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VOL. LV No. 3

ADVENTURE

25 Cents

OCTOBER
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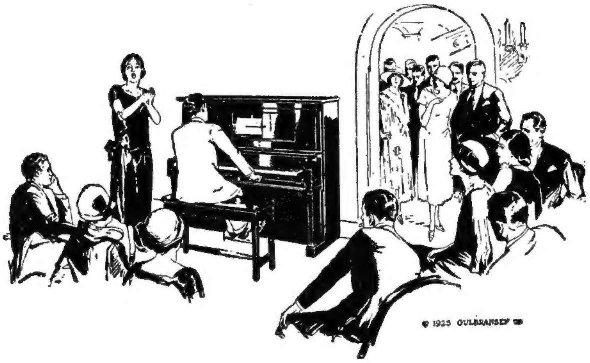
1925
25c

PUBLISHED
THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure

W. C. Tuttle
Alan LeMay
Wilkeson O'Connell
Hugh Pendexter
Bill Adams
Robert Simpson
John Murray Reynolds
Charles Tenney Jackson
T. T. Flynn

1 Complete Novel
2 Complete Novelettes



Those who stopped outside to listen did not know he was playing her accompaniment *without touching the keys!*

It happened at the Drake Hotel, Chicago, during the National Music Convention in June

And now anyone—without previous training—can play roll music with the same control of Keys—the same Personal Touch that a pianist has in playing by hand

THAT morning one of the visitors at the Music Trades Convention was playing roll music on the Gulbransen Registering Piano with all the expression of a brilliant pianist—yet this man could not tell one note from another on a piece of sheet music!

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It was a thrilling revelation—this instrument on which can be played roll music with all the Self-Expression—the Personal Touch—the variety of Tone Volume—that hand-playing has.

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You can play the introduction to a ballad or an operatic aria as a musician would play it—lively at first, then slowly as you near the words, then pausing for the singer, then subduing the melody to a whisper.

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Hand-playing had it. Player pianos did not. So untrained persons could not play as musicians do.

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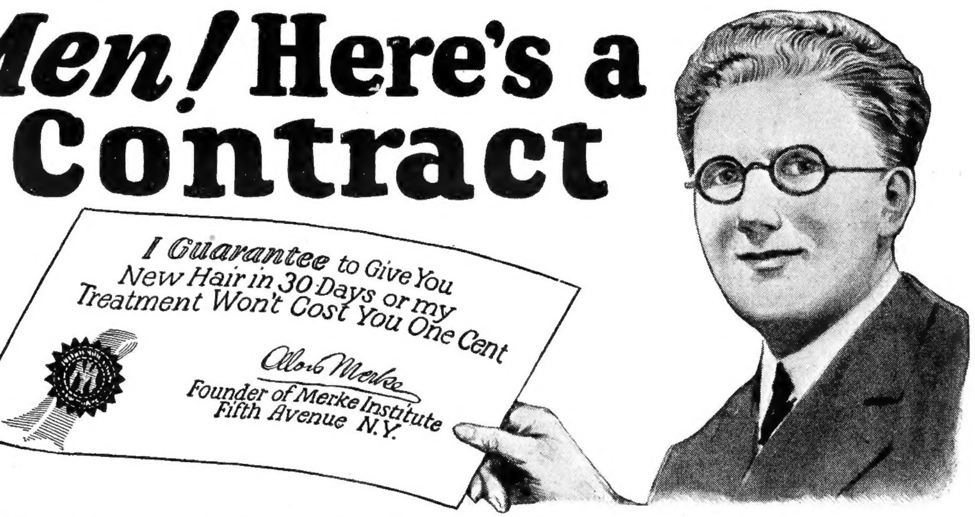
Men! Here's a Contract



I Guarantee to Give You New Hair in 30 Days or my Treatment Won't Cost You One Cent

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Founder of Merke Institute Fifth Avenue N.Y.

NEW HAIR in 30 Days Or Absolutely No Cost

Save Yourself From Baldness. Stop Falling Hair. Here is Your Contract— Grow New Hair in 30 Days Or This Trial Won't Cost You One Cent.

By ALOIS MERKE

Founder of Famous Merke Institute, Fifth Avenue, New York

THAT'S clear, isn't it? I make no conditions. No matter how fast your hair is falling out, no matter how much of it is gone—this offer stands. I don't care what treatments you've tried without results—here is a new scientific system that will give you a new head of hair—or I pay the whole cost of the treatment myself.

How am I able to make this amazing offer? Because the Merke System of hair growth is founded upon a recent scientific discovery. I have found during many years of experience in the Merke Institute, Fifth Avenue, N. Y., that in most baldness the hair roots are NOT dead, but merely dormant—asleep!

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There's no room here to tell you all about your hair—and about the amazing contract I offer you. But I will be glad to tell you all if you are interested. It's free—absolutely without any obligations. Just mail the coupon and I will send you, without cost, a wonderfully interesting booklet that describes in detail the system that is proving a boon to thousands in this and other countries. Mail this coupon and the booklet will reach you by return mail. **Allied Merke Institutes, Inc., Dept. 5810, 512 Fifth Avenue, N. Y. C.**

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Please send me—without cost or obligation—a copy of your book, "The New Way to Grow Hair," describing the Merke System.

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City ....State................

ADVENTURE
Oct. 30th, 1925

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 55
Number 3

Money's Red Flag

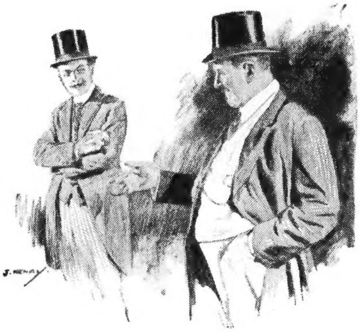
TO the office of a big insurance company come pathetic stories of money lost in speculation and unwise investments. Dismayed men and women, when it is too late, tell their experiences of funds provided by life insurance or saved by thrift, lost in wild-cat schemes promising great returns, sunk in "sure thing" tips from well-meaning friends and relatives, or frittered away in stock speculation.

The pity of it is that the hardest blows often fall on those least able to bear them—on men past the age of self-support, on women with no business experience, on young people trying to get a start in the world.

The Eternal Temptation

Over and over again one hears, "Surely there must be some way that I can get more than 6% on my money with safety. I am promised—practically guaranteed—that a certain stock will pay 10% or more and probably double in value. Only a few people know about this. A friend has just told me and says I must act quickly or lose the chance. Shall I invest?" The answer, in most cases, is "NO—that is not an investment, it is a speculation."

Records show that in all lines of business, the majority of new enterprises fail. And in the purely speculative ventures the losses are appalling.



DOLLAR PIRATES!

"The first thing to do, Blackie, is to look at the map and pick out a town where smart people have money in banks. Somewhere in this big United States people have been saving up coin for years, just waiting for us to come and get it."

So said J. Rufus (Get-Rich-Quick) Wallingford, smiling and engaging character from the pen of the late George Randolph Chester. So true to life—his counterparts are to be found the world over. Bold in the open and cunning behind cover, they plunder alike the simple, the greedy, the rich and the poor.

According to Postmaster General New, the people of this country are robbed of more than $1,000,000,000 a year in mail-fraud schemes alone! How much more is lost through other frauds cannot be estimated.

Don't let a Wallingford get *your* savings!

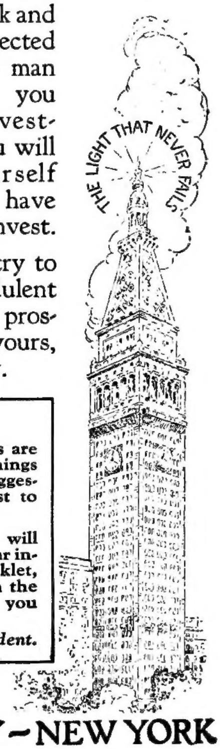
There is a definite danger line in investing money—and that line is located today at about 6%. This does not mean that everything below 6% is sound, nor that everything above is speculative, but—Money's Red Flag of warning appears at this level. Remember—"the higher the rate the greater the risk." Remember also that those who have but little money can least afford to take chances.

Investing is a Profession

Investing money is a highly specialized profession. None but experts know the comparative and ever changing values of various investments. Safe investments cannot be made on memory of *past* values.

Go to a bank and ask to be directed to the best man to advise you about investment. You will find yourself welcome even though you have only a small amount to invest.

The banker of today will try to protect you against fraudulent investments because general prosperity, which includes yours, helps the bank's prosperity.


THE LIGHT THAT NEVER FAILS

The United States Government is trying to put out of business and put in jail all investment crooks and especially those who prey upon persons of small means—who can least afford to lose their money. Whenever you receive circulars or pamphlets or letters offering to make you rich over night, turn them over to the Post Office Department so that the Government may investigate, and, if necessary, prosecute.

Better Business Bureaus of various cities, bankers associations, national associations of manufacturers and other groups are issuing warnings against fake stock promotors. Many organizations are joining hands to prevent the stealing of billions of dollars by these financial tricksters.

Many of the foremost manufacturing plants are trying to protect their workers by issuing warnings in pay envelopes and on Bulletin Boards. Suggestions for notices will be mailed on request to interested executives.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company will neither criticize nor advise as to any particular investment but will be glad to mail free a booklet, "How to Invest Your Money" dealing with the general problem of investing which may aid you to avoid financial pitfalls. Send for it.

HALEY FISKE, *President.*

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October 30th 1925. Vol. LV No. III.

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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A free question and answer service bureau of information on outdoor life and activities everywhere. Comprising seventy-four geographical sub-divisions, with special sections on Radio, Mining and Prospecting, Weapons, Fishing, Forestry, Aviation, Army Matters, North American Anthropology, Health on the Trail, Railroading, Herpetology and Entomology.

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Three Complete Novelettes

GEORGE E. HOLT

"*HAMID* is dead." Three words and no more. But to *Morton Starr* they meant that the time for the fulfillment of a mysterious mission was at hand. "MOORISH GOLD," a complete novelette about Morocco by George E. Holt, will appear in the next issue.

WHEN *Poggioli* asked the natives of Cap Haitien what kind of a governor they preferred they answered, "A Papa Loi, of course." They wanted a man who could read their hearts, but voodooism and civilized tactics played a game that lost them their wish. "THE GOVERNOR OF CAP HAITIEN," a complete novelette by T. S. Stribling, will appear in the next issue.

GEORGE was good for nothing but to beg money upon the streets and to remember better days. Then he met the old Japanese. "THE LAST LAUGH," a complete novelette by Sidney Herschel Small, is in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

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EVEREADY
FLASHLIGHTS
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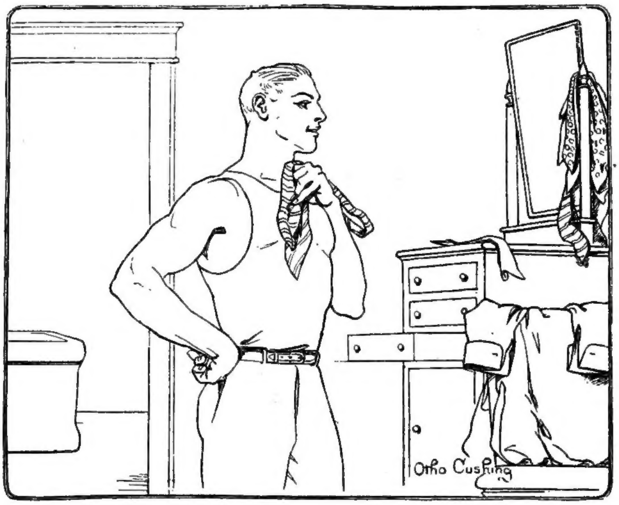
To men who would like to wear bright neckties



WHEN a member of the Modest Order of Gray Doves suddenly breaks out a brilliant pennon from his Adam's apple, you may be pretty sure he has found some subtle reason for flinging defiance at a threatening world.

Perhaps something nice has happened to his bank account. Perhaps he has just found his soul. Or perhaps he has just had an Ivory bath.

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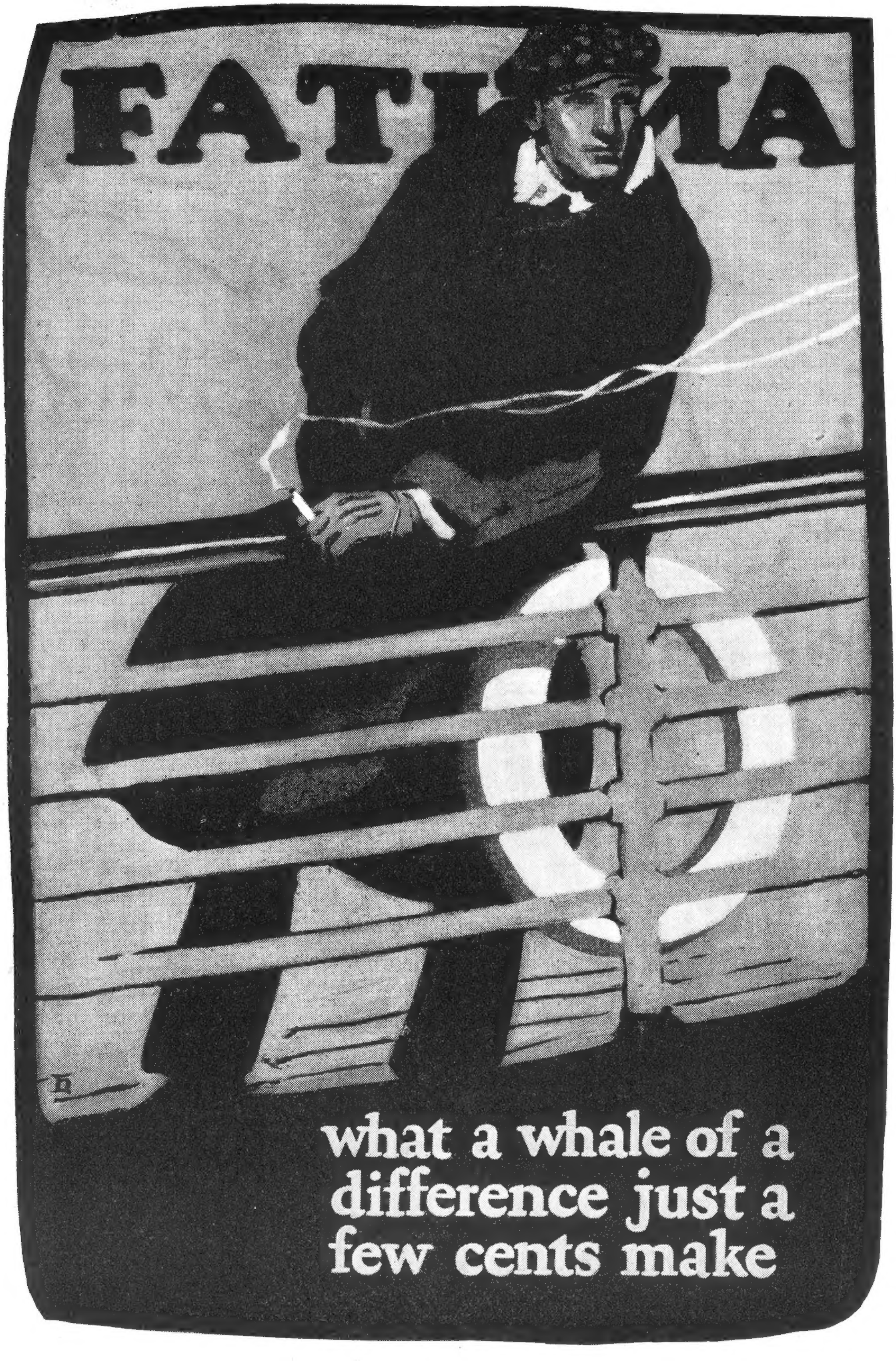
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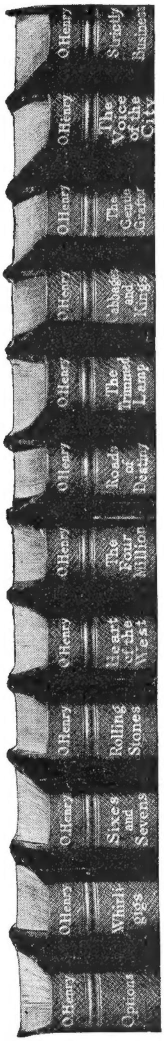
what a whale of a difference just a few cents make

Can a Woman Love Two Men?



"HELEN felt a marvelous and *compelling thrill* in the presence of this man. One evening he came to her in her room with *fire in his eyes and a thrill in his voice* .... 'I'm awfully sorry, but I'm married!' she replied" .... Yet, *fifteen minutes later,* she was leaping, hurrying, *flying up the stairs to him,* and ....

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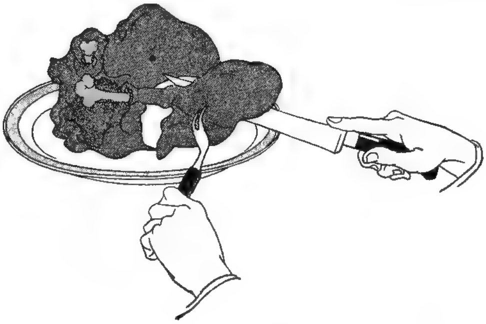

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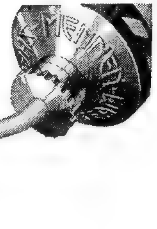

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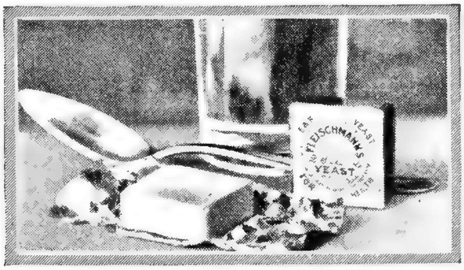

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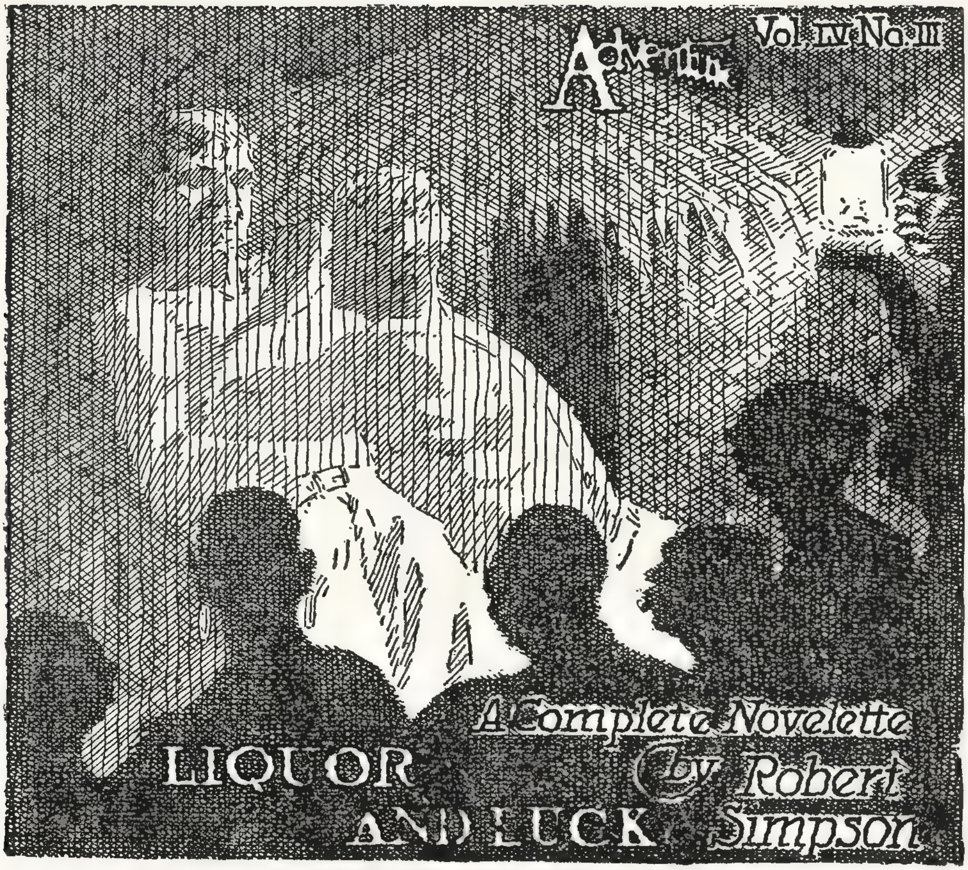
Mrs. F. R. Conner, Florence, Ky.



Author of "Calvert of Allobar," "Mud," etc.

THEY met in the *Sapeli's* smoking-room as she was rounding Holyhead and leaving the Mersey behind her. One was dark, beetle-browed and stocky; the other was fair and lithe, pink of cheek and brown of eye and almost too handsome to be trusted. They were both young and alone, with the stamp of the first-timer plainly imprinted all over them.

Neither of them had had any one to see them off when the ship left Princes Dock. They had stood by the rail, practically elbow to elbow, voiceless companions in their loneliness, watching the fluttering of feminine handkerchiefs and the rather solemn and measured uplifting of masculine hats. And the fair young man, who had his share of imagination, had studied the faces of the people on the dock and received a renewed impression that going to West Africa was not unlike going to a funeral.

Then, without admitting any common bond of sympathy, they had wandered aimlessly and separately up and down the promenade deck until they had found the smoking-room, where they could hardly help becoming aware of each other's existence since they had the place to themselves.

Though neither of them had ever been beyond Holyhead before, or any other headland for that matter, both were doing their utmost to appear travel-hardened and entirely unconscious of the unusual character of their surroundings.

"Pretty choppy, isn't it," the fair young man said at last and thought it sounded convincingly experienced. "We're going to get it in the Bay, I imagine."

The dark young man said—

"Yes, I think so—" without being quite sure what bay was referred to.

He would never have entered the smoking-room if he had not seen the other fellow go in. He knew there were places

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on board ship—just as there were in museums and churches and public halls—where the public was not supposed to go, and he had never gone into any place that was in the least doubtful until he saw someone else go in first. But, of course, he would not have admitted this, any more than he would have admitted he did not know that the name of the bay in question was the Bay of Biscay.

"Where are you bound for?" the fair young man asked at last, nonchalantly lighting another cigaret.

"Siluko."

"That's over Benin River way, isn't it?"

"I get off this boat at Forcados and get another boat or something there."

The fair young man nodded.

"Forcados is the last stop," he explained generously. "At least it is for this boat. Every second week they go down to Calabar. I'm going to Warri for the A. P. A."

"The what?"

"The African Produce Association. Who are you for?"

"Marsden & Co. They told me at the office this morning that I'd maybe have to go to Warri first and take a canoe from there. Will I have to paddle it myself?"

The dark young man seemed to be considerably disturbed about the possibility, and his companion laughed the laugh of broad experience.

"No, of course not. You'll just loll on the little deck amidships and cuss the paddle-boys and watch the water go by."

"Oh." There was a rather dull pause. "Been out before?"

"No," frankly enough, "but I have a brother who is an agent for the A. P. A. at Bonny, a cousin who is a traveling commissioner on the Gold Coast, and an uncle of mine was a resident commissioner in Northern Nigeria for Heaven knows how many years. He wrote a book about it. My name's Seaforth."

"I'm Cooper," the dark young man confessed and seemed to regret, in a dull kind of way, that being just Cooper did not mean anything.

IN ROUGH weather, an afternoon and evening on the Irish Sea is a test of any man's seaworthiness.

Therefore, as the *Sapeli* ploughed her way southward, and the Irish Sea was followed immediately by the turbulent English Channel and the even more turbulent Bay of Biscay, all first-timers were excused from meals without question and without losing caste.

Cooper was very sick. He was sick for three days and in that time knew neither God nor man.

Seaforth, however, did not miss a meal. Most of the time, because the deck was forbidden to passengers, he sat in the square around the bar drinking long drinks and looking speculatively up at the windows of the saloon skylight that, for the better part of three days, were washed by the gray-green waters of the Channel and the Bay.

Occasionally, he went below to visit Cooper in his cabin. But he did not stay very long. Cooper, apparently, wanted to be left alone, and when any one invaded his privacy even to condole, his language was of the sort that might have come out of Scotland Road or Whitechapel.

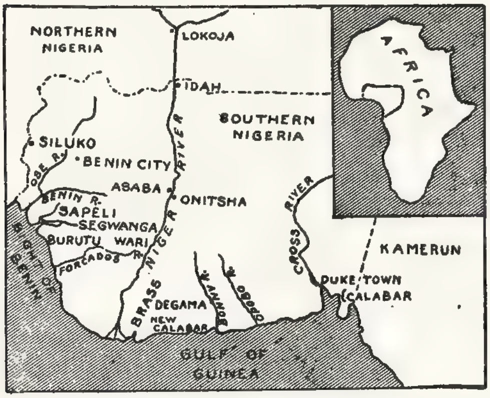
Seaforth did not like this. He was not a snob, and the drinks he drank indicated that, unless prudence came to his assistance, his sojourn on the West Coast of Africa was likely to be short and inglorious. But profanity of the sort in which Cooper indulged had never been necessary to him under any circumstances, and he thought that perhaps, even if Cooper and he were going as far as Warri together, it might be as well to discourage Cooper's companionship while on shipboard.

Normally this would have been rather difficult since they sat at the same table, which happened to be the chief engineer's; but Seaforth, who rarely troubled himself with doubts of any kind, was not aware of any difficulty in Cooper's case; not when his mind was made up about it.

Cooper appeared at table for lunch on the fourth day. He did not eat much and had no excuses to offer. Neither did he have anything to say about his recent, unpleasant experience; did not even mention it. He looked dull and disinterested and did not appear to observe that Seaforth's manner toward him had become rather distant.

They did not go up on deck together. Seaforth avoided this by referring to an appointment in the library with a young lady who was going to Madeira for the winter. So Cooper slouched off by himself and presently found entertainment in the smoking room, where, in glum sobriety, he made the afternoon pay for itself by winning rather more than two pounds at penny nap.

But he made no mention of this at dinner that evening; not even though a doctor who was going to Lagos and who was another of his table companions, was bemoaning the fact that he had missed being the winner of the sweepstake on the day's run of the ship by a very small margin.



Cooper, apparently, was not interested. He had never heard of this kind of sweepstake, but he did not encourage Seaforth, who seemed to know all about it, to furnish him with further information. Instead, when dinner was over, he ambled off to the smoking-room again and, as glumly and soberly as ever, won several more pounds and shillings and pence at penny nap.

Later, on his way to his cabin he encountered Seaforth ordering his last drink before the bar closed. Seaforth's eyes were heavy and he had obviously been indulging his failing even more generously than usual; else he would not have been so congenial.

"Hello, Cooper. Have a long one on me before the gate shuts down."

Cooper shook his head in expressionless refusal.

"Never touch it."

"Oh, come on. Just one. Every coaster drinks, you know. You'll die if you don't."

"And you'll die if you do. So what's the difference?" A pause. "Want me to help you to your cabin when you've swilled that down?"

The tall glass, on it's way to Seaforth's lips, stopped midway. In an instant his eyes had become much less dull, and he regarded Cooper for a long moment as a floor-walker might have regarded an insulting hod-carrier. Then he decided to be tolerant and smiled with one half of his mouth.

"I never swill my drinks, Cooper, old man, and I'm never in need of the sort of assistance you offer. Thanks just the same. Good night."

Cooper made no answer to this; not so much as the flicker of an eyelash. His glumly phlegmatic expression did not alter in the least, and, simply shrugging his shoulders slightly, he turned toward the companion-way leading down to the staterooms and left Seaforth to drink himself to death at his leisure.

Seaforth's left hand went mechanically up to his head and smoothed back his fair and wavy hair; a trick he had when he was disturbed. His right hand still held the glass poised in mid-air, and his glance, somewhat dull again, followed Cooper's slouching exit until the latter disappeared.

Then Seaforth smiled convincingly and drank; and later went down to his cabin to sleep and to dream of a coffin that was shaped like a cask.

He was inside the thing; and outside, and particularly at the head end, a hundred coopers' hammers were thundering in a deliberate attempt to prevent him from staying as peacefully dead as he wanted to be.

THE following day Cooper drew a number in the ship's run sweepstake and won second place. On the day after that he drew another number and created something of a murmur of astonishment by again winning second place. Then, as the *Sapeli*, rather more than a day late, sighted Madeira and dropped anchor in Funchal's Bay, Cooper's third sweepstake number hoisted him into first place and made the ship's company want to know who Cooper was.

Cooper did not tell them. He pocketed his sweepstake winnings with the same impolitely glum indifference with which he accepted his steadily increasing luck in the smoking-room, and, leaning against the rail of the promenade deck, looked upon the picture-book whites and greens and reds of Funchal's near-tropic color scheme without comment.

Later, because every one else, including Seaforth, seemed to be doing it, he went ashore in a tender. And at the jetty ignoring the services of a guide and paying no attention to the direction in which Seaforth had gone, he slouched alone through Funchal's alley-like streets, looking imperturbably upon the cripples and diseased beggars who made it a part of their business to display their naked deformities and open sores to the public.

The cathedral; the opera house; gardens that were rich in palms and which exuded a fragrance that made sleepy indifference to life in general not at all difficult; the carmine-lipped Portugese ladies who smiled invitingly down to him from the balconies of certain private residences that were not nearly so private as they looked; these things seemed to pass Cooper by, just as if he had seen it all before and was bored by the unchanging monotony of it.

Then he came to the doors of a shop that sold everything a traveler to the tropics might be likely to want, and a great many things for which he would never have any use, but which, if he had never been there before, he would be most likely to buy.

Cooper paused there, looked into the darkened interior of the place and saw that two or three of his fellow passengers from the *Sapeli* were making purchases of one kind and another. So he hesitated; and then, more audibly than he probably realized, whispered rather viciously to himself:

"Go on! Get in! What are you afraid of? You've got money!"

Evidently, however, this was not convincing enough, for Cooper still hesitated, making a pretence of looking into the overcrowded shop window, as if the goods on display afforded him only the most casual interest.

Suddenly his eyes became possessed of a light. It gleamed in them for just the fraction of a second, but for this brief space, his habitually glum look was completely dispelled and his face took on an expression that was almost beatific.

He had never seen a pair of mosquito boots before. Consequently he did not know that the ornate, high-topped boots in the shop window were the kind of boots he had been advised to buy before he put his ankles and legs at the mercy of the Benin mosquito.

But he did think, as he gazed at those particular boots of soft brown leather, with red and black and yellow mosaic tops, that if there were any possible justification for the loneliness for which West African life was famous, those boots were it. He could wear them out there and no one but himself need ever see them.

And if he could only get over being such a fool about going into new and strange places, doing new and strange things, or simply looking at new and strange sights; if, for just five minutes, he could forget to think that people were watching him make a fool of himself every time he did something or went somewhere he had not done or gone before, he would buy those boots; also the silk Madeira shawl and handkerchiefs he had promised to send home to his sister in Warrington.

But his feet were heavy and the look of glum indifference—

"Something you would like?" a soft persuasive Latin voice wheedled at his elbow—the elbow nearest the shop door. "Ze shair, ze flask, ze peelow, ze dress wit' ze so fine handworking, ze shawl, ze boots—"

"Shawl," Cooper grunted, "and boots—that pair. Handkerchiefs? Silk—ladies'—you know?"

"Oh, ze ver' fine han'k'chief. Ver' fine. You come inside and—"

"All right. Hurry up."

He passed into the shop in the clerk's wake, nodded perfunctorily to one of the *Sapeli's* passengers who recognized him and tried to guide the clerk into the shop's darkest corner so that no one would see the boots he was going to buy.

The man he had nodded to was considering a display of shawls that were spread out before him and which he was inspecting with the air of one who was no stranger to making purchases of the sort.

Cooper, however, wasted no time at all over his selection of shawls or handkerchiefs. Two minutes after the clerk had wrapped them up for mailing to Warrington, Cooper could not have told what their colors were.

"The boots," he prompted the clerk. "The pair I showed you. Hurry up."

"Yes, sir. So ver' queeck."

It appeared, however, that the pair of boots in the window was the only pair of their kind in the shop; and when the clerk had gone to the window and began laboriously to dig them out, while Cooper fidgeted in gloomy disapproval at the delay, the low door of the shop was suddenly darkened by the figures of several men and two ladies. And one of the men, with a deep bass voice said quite distinctly:

"Good lord! The boots are actually going to be sold at last!"

"What boots?" a voice that sounded like Seaforth's asked quickly.

"The pair Manuel's taking out of the window. They've been there for my past three tours at least." A broad laugh punctuated this. "Some plantation hand has probably been saving up for years to buy them."

And then the group filed into the shop and he of the large bass voice developed into a Northern Nigerian resident commissioner who had been active in running the sweepstakes on board the *Sapeli*. So when he greeted Cooper breezily, his friendliness was well-intentioned.

"Why, hello Cooper. Not spending your luck already, are you?"

Cooper mumbled something unintelligible and his hand went up to his cap in mechanical deference to the presence of the ladies who were ship companions bound for Sekondi and Lagos to join their husbands.

The other men did not matter; not even Seaforth, who had given Cooper the widest possible berth in the past few days, and for whom Cooper had developed a kind of pitying indifference that did not lend itself readily to words.

Just then Cooper saw only the ladies and the man who had so effectively turned the limelight on the boots. All the rest, for several seconds, was a blur; and out of that blur came the all-too-obliging clerk triumphantly bearing the boots.

Some one laughed; a sound that chilled Cooper to the marrow and made the beads of sweat on his forehead become clammily cold in an instant.

"Good Heavens, man, you're not going to *buy*—"

The deep bass voice of the Resident Commissioner, raised in fatherly protest, stopped abruptly, and, vaguely, Cooper saw that one of the ladies, who looked like a matronly graduate from a *Floradora* sextet, had touched the resident's sleeve.

"The chairs are over this way," she broke in quickly. "And if we're going to look up the consul afterward, we'll have to hurry."

"Er—yes—yes, of course."

"Here are ze boots," the shop clerk urged. "Oh, ze ver' fine! Ze leather and ze so beautiful handworking— "

The clerk's selling talk was interrupted by a laugh; the same laugh as before, which, though softer this time, was none the less chilling, drowning every other sound just as an explosion might have done.

The Resident Commissioner and his lady companions had swerved suddenly in the direction of the Madeira chairs, and the others, save Seaforth and the shop clerk, leisurely followed.

"How much?"

Cooper heard himself say this, but doubted if the clerk did. However, the clerk did hear and quoted a price that he was sure would sell the boots at last.

"All right," Cooper mumbled stubbornly. "Wrap 'em up."

Then suddenly, as far as Cooper was concerned, Seaforth became the only other occupant of the shop.

"Thought you were going out to Marsden's at Siluko?" Seaforth inquired blandly.

Cooper's chin lifted. Inside of him, he was sick with a fear that had cursed him as far back as he could remember; the fear of making himself conspicuous and foolish and an object of public laughter. Externally, however, he looked more glumly truculent than ever.

"I am."

"And you're going to wear those things—" Seaforth jerked his head expressively in the direction of the boots that were being hurriedly wrapped up—"on Marsden's Siluko factory?"

"Why not?"

Seaforth did not say. He just laughed softly; that same chilling sound that froze Cooper's spine and made the world about him go black and red in turns.

Then Seaforth was strolling toward the chair department where the woman who looked like a matronly graduate from a *Floradora* sextet was keeping her companion occupied with the momentous business of trying to decide which of several chairs was the most comfortable to sit in.

Cooper followed Seaforth upon a sudden, near-murderous impulse—just one step. Then he stopped short and his clenched hands relaxed and his whole body became limp with a most depressing sense of futility; particularly with that woman around.

And presently, he was out in the alley-like streets again, with a bundle under his arm.

When he reached the jetty, however, and

boarded the tender that was to carry him back to the *Sapeli*, he did not have the bundle.

He had dropped it into the eager lap of a beggar who, though Cooper had not taken time to notice, was minus a leg.

THE *Sapeli* stopped at Teneriffe and Las Palmas, but there was no time to go ashore.

This was perfectly satisfactory to Cooper who would not have gone ashore in any case, and, after the ship had cleared Las Palmas and was headed for the African coast, he was glad the next stop was six or seven days away.

The number of passengers had diminished considerably since the tourists to the Canaries had been disposed of. Every man had his own stateroom and Cooper liked this so much that, for a day or so, he made the most of it.

He appeared only for meals and though no one, not even Seaforth, referred to the boots, Cooper was just as uncomfortable as if his taste in mosquito boots was the sole topic of conversation.

Several times he thought Seaforth was silently laughing at his misery, but, as he could not be sure about this, he continued to keep a grip upon his impulses and allow time and circumstances to afford him the proper opportunity.

Because he was expected to, he continued to draw numbers in the sweepstakes, but, as was also the case in the smoking-room, his luck seemed to have deserted him. However, he appeared to expect this, and his losses did not alter his expression any more than his winning streak had done.

At night, after dinner, most of the men foregathered on the upper deck and held a sing-song, or swapped stories that were only half true and others that were not true at all; indulged in gymnastics with deck chairs or performed feats of strength with an engine-room poker; anything that afforded them the opportunity to forget their several destinations.

For no man to whom the West Coast of Africa was not a new thing, crossed the graveyard between Las Palmas and Sierra Leone without a twinge of regret that was punctuated by a mark of interrogation.

Several of them, as every one knew, would be reported missing when it came time to return again. The Graveyard itself would probably swallow the fever-shattered wrecks of a few, as, in the past, it had earned its sinister soubriquet by becoming the tomb of so many of those who had delayed their flight from the White Man's Grave just a little too long.

However, no one told Cooper about this. As a rule he sat on the outer edge of the varied nightly performances on deck, watching Seaforth keep the deck steward busy fetching him drinks.

Seaforth's partiality for hard liquor did not seem to attract the attention of any one else, possibly because he never lost control of his legs or his tongue. In fact, the more he drank the more rational and likable he appeared to become. And Cooper had observed by this time that Seaforth was not good company for any one until after lunch.

Then came the evening, just before the *Sapeli* reached Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Cooper was climbing the companion stairs from the saloon to the deck, when his foot slipped, and, with a lurch of the ship to help him on his way, he was in serious danger of being hurled backward upon his head.

Naturally his arms spread themselves. His hands grabbed at anything that might happen to be handy, and it chanced that the coat-tail of a huge, bearded Frenchman, named Bouvier, came within reach of Cooper's clawing fingers.

Bouvier was big enough and sure enough on his feet to stand the sudden weight he was called upon to support, and as Cooper fell backward, the Frenchman's large right arm enwrapped him, much as if he had been a child, and, with a throaty, Gallic laugh, hoisted him with ridiculous ease onto the landing, three steps above.

Cooper thanked him in a mumbling, incoherent fashion, reached the deck and, almost without stopping to think, headed for the smoking-room.

That night he won; and the next and the next; all the way down the coast from Freetown to Lagos Roads.

His luck, so he believed, ran this way. For several days—four or five perhaps—he could not lose; and then, suddenly, and for a like period, he could not win. And this did not apply to games of chance only.

His seasickness had been the climax to a sequence of days when everything seemed to go wrong, and winning first place in the sweepstake had been a climax of the opposite sort to a somewhat shorter stretch in which everything had gone right.

Then had come the episode of the mosquito boots. This, Cooper had interpreted as adequate warning of a spell of "bad weather" which he decided had ended when the big Frenchman's good right arm had saved him from cracking his head on the companion stairs.

AND as the *Sapeli* came to anchor in Lagos Roads, Cooper knew that the luck that had kept him company down the Coast, had decided, in the final stage of his journey, to leave him again.

In Lagos Roads, passengers bound for Lagos, were trans-shipped to a low-draught branch boat that wallowed, dirty and indifferent, at a safe and respectful distance from the queenly mail boat. This trans-shipping process was not a pleasant one and, as a general thing, afforded the remaining passengers a fund of amusement and sometimes a hint of real excitement.

Each Lagos-bound passenger was requested and required to proceed to the lower deck and, in full view of the whole ship's company, to become seated in what was familiarly known as the "mammy chair." This was nothing more than a particularly sturdy wicker arm-chair fitted with hoisting tackle and straps that, among other things, were intended to prevent the victim from falling out of the chair when, to the tune of a donkey engine's working rattle, it was hoisted up in the usual way, swung out beyond the rail and lowered into a bobbing surf-boat far below, just like any other sling-full of baggage or freight.

When Cooper saw this performance he did not smile. Instead he felt icy cold though the palms of his hands were wet with perspiration.

He did not have to take any part in the proceedings; was simply a spectator who was privileged to smile, if he cared to, at the rather comical misery of several fellow humans who, one by one, walked to the "mammy chair" and took their place in it, just as if it were the electrical kind in use at Sing Sing.

Cooper, however, could not smile. And it was not the several shark fins plainly visible round about the ship that made him shiver; or the apparently inadequate size of the surf-boat that bobbed about as uncertainly so very far below; or the not too remote possibility that the hoisting tackle would suddenly become defective or that the donkey engine operator would fail to catch or interpret or act upon the chief officer's signals in time.

Cooper scarcely thought of any of this. To him, by far the worst part of the ordeal was the walk to the chair and the business of being strapped into it before the eyes of the assembled spectators lining the rails of the upper decks.

Just the thought of having to do this made his knees shake and his throat dry up. And as he watched the several Lagos-bound passengers waiting their turn and, one by one, go through with it; saw them being dangled in mid-air, lowered overside and jerked up and down according to the dictates of the donkey engine until chair and surf-boat decided to be in the same place at the same time, Cooper's sympathies were touched so acutely that his nerves were rasped by the strain of it; just as if every journey the chair made was made with him in it.

He did not notice that Seaforth, in possession of his forenoon grouch, had loitered to a place at his elbow, and, at first, did not hear Seaforth's assumably witty and indiscriminate remarks upon the demeanour of the several victims on the deck below.

But he did observe that, among the victims was a lady whose name he had learned was Mrs. Farleigh. She was the woman who looked like a matronly graduate from a *Florodora* sextet, and he had no difficulty in remembering that she had, upon an acute occasion, been tactfully kind to him.

With the others, but a little apart from them, she was waiting her turn, talking to the Northern Nigerian Resident Commissioner who had been her companion on the Funchal occasion. Apparently she was not anxious to remind the chief officer that ladies were first, and as she was obviously talking much more volubly than usual, fussing with her sun-helmet and looking in the chief officer's direction every few seconds to be quite sure he was not going to ask her to be next.

Cooper knew she was not afraid; not physically. It was just the stupidity of the whole business, with every one looking on, that made her nervous. And when her turn finally did come, she shook hands with the Northern Nigerian Commissioner and smiled up at him with so little color in her cheeks and lips that Cooper, without thinking of the mosquito-boot incident, turned abruptly from the rail, so that he, at least, might not increase her embarrassment by staring vulgarly upon it.

It was then he saw Seaforth. And Seaforth was smiling; a smile that halted Cooper sharply and which in another second or two, developed into a low and most irritating laugh.

"I'll wager Mrs. Farleigh will raise —— with her hubby for getting himself transferred to Lagos." This to no one in particular. "Hello, Cooper. Been watching the fun?"

"Fun." Cooper said this tonelessly, his eyes narrowing in contemplation of Seaforth's blond pulchritude. "You think laughing at a woman is fun?"

"Oh, rubbish," testily. "Don't be a —— fool."

Cooper struck. He had been waiting for the excuse for almost two weeks; and doubtless this was why the blow, like the impulse, was wild. It collided with the side of Seaforth's head, damaging his beauty not at all.

And in the smallest fraction of time, this blond and beautiful young man who drank too many long drinks, became taut as a violin string. The ball of his left foot pressed firmly into the deck, his body swayed forward, throwing the whole weight of his shoulders behind a short, stabbing right to Cooper's jaw.

And Cooper's luck, this time in the cause of chivalry, went out into the dark.

As he dropped to the deck and lay there unmoving, to the accompaniment of a shout of astonishment from those near-by, attention was immediately diverted from the operation of the mammy chair to the fight.

Thus, while everybody in sight came crowding around Seaforth and gazed upon Cooper's prostrate form, Mrs. Farleigh was permitted to make her descent into the surfboat in comparative privacy, and Cooper's indebtedness to her, such as it was, was paid in full.

In his cabin, some time later, Cooper did not review the incident with any thoughts of chivalry or discounted debts in his head.

Gently rubbing an aching jaw, and with several remarks of the *Sapeli's* captain still sounding in his ears, he sat quite alone and wondered how it came about that anything so flawlessly beautiful as Seaforth could hit like that.

Cooper could appreciate Seaforth's speed and precision and punching power because, under less impulsive and excitable conditions, he had not a little speed and precision and punching power of his own. He knew exactly what had happened, and why and how Seaforth had made it happen. To him there was nothing miraculous about it; nothing except the astounding fact, that Seaforth, the blond, liquor-swilling tailor's dummy, had done it!

This circumstance suggested to Cooper a climax more pleasurable than it was probable in the near future—before Seaforth and he reached Warri where they would perforce part company.

Unfortunately, however, they would reach Warri within the next two or three days, and as his, Cooper's luck, was out just then, and would, of course, stay out for four or five days at least, it did not seem to Cooper that he was going to be given much of an opportunity to even things up, or that it would be the most propitious time for him to attempt to do so provided the opportunity actually did turn up. He would be sure to lose or make a mess of things if he did.

And yet—

HE BRAVED the eyes of the world in the saloon at dinner that evening simply to get a new look at Seaforth from a scientific angle. And, seated at the same table with his conqueror, as glumly indifferent, apparently, to the quiet smiles of the thinned-out passenger list, as he was to the speculative twinkle in the gray eyes of the chief engineer immediately opposite, he came to the conclusion that Seaforth was at least twenty pounds heavier and good, at top speed, for two and possibly three rounds, with a referee and a time-keeper to protect him.

However, as in this case, there would be no referee and consequently no rounds at all and therefore no minute of rest between them, Cooper felt safe in concluding that this estimate of Seaforth's staying powers could be cut in half; perhaps about four or five minutes of straight uninterrupted fighting.

So that Cooper's glum expression, as dinner progressed, gradually became still more so. Four to five minutes, with a man of Seaforth's weight and punching ability, was too long. For, of course, there was no doubt whatever about Seaforth's speed and accuracy. And as Cooper was only too well aware, speed plus the punch, plus the weight behind it—

Thus did Cooper convince himself, in great bitterness, that his luck was surely out this time.

Seaforth had everything. He had poise and manner and looks, speed and weight and the punch. He was at home everywhere; was never at a loss for a word, and did not have an ounce of hesitancy or diffidence in his system. Also, without the slightest sign of embarrassment, and without being in the least obvious or unpleasant about it, he ignored Cooper completely; put him in his place, as it were, and, with a kind of tolerant punctiliousness, saw to it that he remained there.

This was most unpleasant for Cooper. He objected to it, silently, of course, on grounds that were both primitive and profane, and it was not a condition that could possibly be permitted to continue indefinitely, luck or no luck.

But even when the *Sapeli* had crossed the Forcados bar, and the rattling of the anchor chains in the mangrove-haunted mouth of the Niger River proclaimed her journey's end, Cooper was still, figuratively and literally, eyeing Seaforth with a depressing sense of futility.

His first glimpse of Nigeria did not help to cheer him up. No man laughs when he sees Forcados for the first time; and the succeeding occasions, if there are any, are generally spent lingeringly around the ship's bar until the trip up river can be put off no longer.

Cooper saw Seaforth doing this; hobnobbing with old-timers, exchanging jokes and drinks and the usual high-pitched exaggerations that passed for truth under the circumstances.

Then Cooper went up on deck again slowly, leaned upon the rail and took another and longer look at Forcados. He was wearing his sun-helmet now; one of the mushroom variety which, he felt, crowned him like a large inverted bowl, and did not in the least make him a part of the scenery, principally because, from his point of view, there was no scenery.

There was just a lot of dark and rumpled water, sparsely dotted with canoes and branch boats, a sternwheeler and a puttering launch or two; and around this was an almost unbroken circle of dusty green bush, relieved from utter gloom by a corrugated iron customs' house and a red-brown Government station flanked by a swamp and an apparently carefully studied quota of palms.

The palms helped Cooper to feel that he had not been altogether cheated in the matter of tropical verdure and color, and even on the *Sapeli's* awning-covered deck there was no doubt about the sun or the scorching tropical heat.

But when he glanced up-river into the the mouth of a somber, mangrove-walled waterway that led, as far as he was concerned, to Warri and the middle of nowhere, his sensations were mixed.

He was going "up there" with Seaforth in a Government launch. This much he had learned from the purser who had added, rather vaguely, that the launch would probably get under way about four or five o'clock.

Whether Seaforth and he were to be the only passengers he did not know, but, in any event, a Government launch did not suggest much fighting space. Neither did it promise anything in the way of an opportunity ashore because, as he had also taken the trouble to learn, its first and only stop was the Government wharf at Warri. And though Cooper was totally unacquainted with the geography of Warri, he surmseid that the Government wharf would not lend itself very readily or peacefully to the kind of purpose he had in mind.

He wanted space and quiet and freedom from all interruptions. He wanted Seaforth all to himself, minus an audience of any sort; and though his luck was out and his chances of coming out on top were as thin as cigaret paper, he felt that he must have that one chance before Seaforth and he parted company.

Seaforth had laughed at him; and Seaforth, before the whole ship's company, had knocked him out; and then, with hardly a gesture, had passed on as if neither of these things mattered in the least.

Cooper's eyes glowed dully under the broad rim of his sun-helmet, but his lips were almost colorless and he gripped the rail with an intensity that would have surprized Seaforth had he been there and interested enough to see.

Seaforth, however, with several older but kindred spirits, was still celebrating his arrival in West Africa, around the ship's bar. And when, about six o'clock, the Government launch finally came alongside the *Sapeli's* companion ladder, it was Cooper's privilege to have to advise Seaforth of the fact.

"That launch is waiting," he announced briefly, and without bothering about the circumstance that Seaforth, at that moment, was keeping a fair-sized audience enthralled with song.

But Seaforth, whose voice was almost as surprizing as his speed and his punch, and who was singing a Balfe ballad by request, finished the song and smiled his acceptance of the applause, just as if Cooper and his announcement did not exist.

"Better swill that down and let's get started," Cooper persisted. "There's a commissioner or something aboard the launch and he's in a hurry."

Seaforth turned his head. As he had already informed Cooper, he did not swill his drinks, but, just then, his humor was too good to take exception to the mere choice of a phrase. He grinned.

"All right, old man. Fine. We'll have just one more all around and then we'll toddle. It isn't every day a man arrives in this old mud hole for the first time. Are you with me, gentlemen? One more round and then—" here Seaforth paused, laughed shortly, then suddenly burst into song again, and on a theme that made every one, including Cooper, gape:

"The Lord bless thee and keep thee,
The Lord make His face shine upon thee,
And be gracious unto thee;
The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee
And give thee peace."

The finely pitched tenor voice trailed away softly on the final note, and the silence that followed had an uncanny touch of awe in it. Seaforth, himself, was the first to break it. He flung back his blond head and laughed, slapped Cooper, who was nearest, on the shoulder, and declared with the same kind of exuberance:

"The little choir-boy isn't dead yet, is he? All right, gentlemen. Never mind the cheers. The carriage waits and we've still to get that last drink off our conscience. You, too, Cooper, old man. Just this once. There's death in the cup, but it's a wonderful death to die!"

The others laughed and promptly began to talk their way out of their church-like daze. But Cooper hesitated, his eyes narrowing. With a hope in his mind which Seaforth's alcoholically inspired good humor did not dispel, he did not want to antagonize him too plainly in that place.

And, possibly, if the Government commissioner—or whatever he was—in the waiting launch, were to become as testily impatient of delay as Cooper suspected he was likely to do, and decided to go off without them, there was a slim chance that some other less restraining means of reaching Warri could be devised; a canoe perhaps.

"All right," gruffly. "Just one."

Seaforth nodded; an absent inclination of the head that took no thought whatever of what Cooper had said. His vagrant attention had gone off elsewhere, dropping Cooper just as suddenly and carelessly as he had been taken up.

And Cooper, though his expression did not change, was not at all slow to get the effect of this. Nevertheless, in the background of events, he drank his one drink because he had said he would, and watched Seaforth drink several more, while a launch with a fuming district commissioner on board, puttered northward into the dark.

Twice a deck steward had appeared at Seaforth's elbow and twice he had gone away again at a nod from Cooper. Then he appeared a third time and announced to Seaforth diffidently:

"The launch is gone, sir."

"Gone? Fine. Let's have another drink."

So that, rather late that evening, two young men proceeded on their way to Warri in an eight-paddle canoe, under the guidance of a head canoe-boy who had been vouched for by the *Sapeli's* chief officer.

One of the young men, dark and stocky and glum of expression, sat hunched up on one side of the awning-covered, matted deck amidships, watching the other young man, blond and lithe and too handsome to be trusted, lying at full length upon his back, humming snatches of anthems to the stars.

THERE was no conversation; not for several long, black miles that reached deeper and deeper into the mangrove-bound maze of eerie, moonless creeks that made the Niger Delta, to the average first-timer, a place of mystery and abiding gloom.

Cooper was the average first-timer. In this case, too, canoe travel provided him with leisurely achieved impressions of the primitive which, in a launch or a cargo boat, would have been more or less lacking.

The dip and the swish of paddles, the grunting of the canoe-boys, the ghostly shapes of other canoes that passed them by or lingered, with soft mumblings and croonings, in the shadow of the bush; the shrill whistling of the crickets, the croak of frogs, the spectral flight of giant, velvet-winged moths under the canoe's grass awning, and whimper and whine and occasional squeal of the animal life that seethed in ever-hungry restlessness behind the black curtain of the mangroves; these minor, surface trifles were all new and strange to Cooper, who was content, for the first few miles, to devote himself almost exclusively to the business of trying to become accustomed to it all.

Seaforth was different. He was not the average first-timer. He knew all about it; had known for years exactly what it was going to be like, and, with his blond head pillowed on his hands on the gently rocking deck of an awning-covered canoe, humming snatches of anthems into the proverbial blackness of the African night—this, to him, was West Africa as it ought to be; everything except Cooper.

Cooper had no place in that canoe. He struck the wrong note; a stupid, dull and rather vulgar note, too, that had never entered into Seaforth's preconceived ideas on the subject. And, after a while, Seaforth stopped humming and thought a little. Presently, without raising his head, he asked simply enough:

"Why didn't you take the launch? You didn't have to wait for me."

Cooper stirred slightly. He was glad Seaforth had broken the ice, even though the sound of the voice had set him shaking, just as if he were afraid.

"I thought—" Cooper stopped and cleared his throat. After all, the simplest way was the best. "I waited for you because we've got something to settle before we reach Warri."

Seaforth's head came up slowly.

"Settle? You and I?"

"Yes—settle. You and I. Before we reach Warri."

Seaforth's head came up a little farther.

"You mean—fight?"

"Fight," tersely. "You didn't think you could settle it all with one punch, did you?"

"All? All what? What —— impertinence are you suffering from now?"

"I know you've got the weight and the luck," Cooper said, ignoring Seaforth's point of view altogether, "but I've got to take a chance on that. The head canoe-boy has a lantern, and the first cleared space we come to, we're going to get out and finish it. That plain enough?"

"Quite." Seaforth laughed; the same soft, irritating laugh of the mosquito-boot incident. "But you have queer notions of gratitude. I give you the privilege of traveling up-river with me and put up with your stupid society without a murmur of complaint, and in return for all this, you want to put me to the trouble of walloping you and of having to explain to Marsden's agent at Warri why you are so badly messed up. I'm afraid, Cooper, your sense of the fitness of things is as poor as your taste in mosquito-boots."

Cooper winced. His throat was dry and he knew, to the marrow of him, that at no point of contact could he hope to meet Seaforth on even terms. But, for all that, luck or no luck, weight or no weight, words or no words, he had to see this thing through before they reached Warri.

"I'll take a chance on you messing me up," he said a little huskily. "And I'll do my own explaining to Marsden's agent whichever way it goes. You're a liquor-swiller, Seaforth, and that's what I'm betting on. I don't think you'll last long enough to mess me up much."

Seaforth's handsome face clouded instantly.

"You little rat!"

Cooper's lips parted upon an impulse that had every intention of being vituperative, but they spread in a grin instead. His throat became moist again and his voice, when he spoke, had lost its huskiness.

"That's all right," easily. "But calling me a rat doesn't prove that a liquor-swiller can last long enough to mess me up. One punch isn't all that's going to be in this fight."

Seaforth sat up straight.

"What the —"

"Oh, shut up. If you've got any bragging to do, do it with your hands. Pretty little choir-boys, who spend their time in barrooms, shouldn't talk out of their turn or they'll get slapped."

"—— you!"

"Stay where you are." Cooper's voice had a startling snap of authority in it. "And don't try any bar-room rough and tumble stuff with me or I'll tear out your guts and hang 'em up to dry."

Seaforth paused and a slight shiver ran down his spine. Obviously, he did not like Cooper's Rabelaisian way of expressing himself, and, during an illuminating second or two, it would have been plain to an unbiased beholder that, for the nonce at least, Cooper was in full charge of the situation.

Then, still shuddering a little, Seaforth slowly lay down again, once more pillowing his head upon his hands.

"Well, what about it?" Cooper demanded truculently.

Seaforth did not answer at once. He had crossed a verbal rapier with an ax and he wanted no more of it.

"All right," quietly. "Anywhere you please."

And in the silence that followed, there were no more anthems; only the dip and the swish of paddles, and Cooper drearily whistling "The Last Rose of Summer" low and out of tune.

IT WAS Cooper who discovered the rendezvous and Seaforth who decided it would probably serve their purpose as well as any other.

For several miles, Cooper's eyes had peered at the solid wall of bush lining the banks of the river, in search of enough space to accommodate the kind of foot work he knew he would need, and when he found it, he referred it to Seaforth for his approval.

The clearing was semi-circular and there was what appeared to be a deserted mud hut in the rear of it. That it was not overgrown with weeds indicated that it probably served as a kind of camping site for vagrant natives, but there were no natives there now and Seaforth decided, with an expressive shrug, that it was probably as good a place as any.

THOUGH the canoe-boys muttered among themselves and seemed rather reluctant about stopping, the headman, who was called upon to light up the scene of the conflict with his hurricane lantern, stepped ashore when he was told to do so and mechanically took up a prescribed position in the side-lines.

He had just as much expression as a lamp-post, and, watching the strangely constituted "small-boy whitemen" removing their collars and shirts and tightening their belts, without indulging in any conversation whatever, he stood perfectly still, dumbly and patiently holding the lantern shoulder high, evidently prepared to continue to do so indefinitely.

Seaforth, at first, approached the affair with an expression of reluctant boredom. But, presently, as he surreptitiously watched Cooper make his preparations, a look of quizzical wonder came into his eyes.

For, there was something almost professional about Cooper's manner now; a manner that took no thought of time or place or circumstance, but which calmly got down to business, wasting no breath in words.

There was no bravado, no sign of vulgar animus, no hint that even Seaforth could detect, of anything unfinished or crude. Here, apparently, upon occasions of the sort, Cooper was at home. Even in the middle of the Niger Delta, in the dead of night, with nothing but the uncertain flicker of a hurricane lantern to light the scene, Cooper's step was light and sure, his chin had a masterful tilt to it, and the glum unpleasantness that had overshadowed his eyes, had entirely departed. In its place was an astonishingly clear and open-eyed calm that, more than anything else, gave Seaforth pause.

He watched Cooper's almost minute inspection of the hard, sun-baked clay surface of the clearing, watched him scuff the rubber sole of his buckskin boots on selected patches of it, and saw him shift the position of the lantern-holder until he was satisfied that he had established him in the right spot. And there was nothing fussy or officious about all this. Evidently Cooper knew what he was about and had appointed himself master of ceremonies because it was perfectly natural, under the circumstances, for him to do so.

And certainly, no one would have suspected that Cooper, light as he was in comparison with his taller opponent, was making himself ready for certain defeat; certain to him, that is.

Though the night, after the habitual tropical fashion, was humid and sticky and enervating, and would be sure to react most unfavorably upon Seaforth after the first minute or two, Cooper knew how his luck ran, and it had never been known to run differently; neither the good luck nor the bad.

Else he would not have been, as he was at that moment, on the verge of burying himself in the obscurity of a Siluko trading-beach kernel store.

But Seaforth saw and suspected none of this. What he did see was a revelation to him, both physically and mentally, and he knew, in those few minutes, without any doubt whatever, that he was going to have a fight on his hands; a fight that he would have to finish as quickly and decisively as possible if he were to finish it at all.

Thus both Cooper and he were agreed upon one thing at least as they faced each other in the center of the clearing, and Cooper said quietly:

"Regular rules—protect yourself at all times—to a finish. All right?"

"Just as you please."

Seaforth's lithe and perfect body stiffened as he spoke, and he backed away a punctiliously courteous step or two, oblivious of Cooper's mechanically outstretched right hand.

Seaforth did not see the hand and Cooper was not aware that he had, from force of habit, offered to "touch gloves" with Seaforth; not until the other man's fingers failed to meet his. Then for a brief and normally inconsequential space of time, Cooper blinked wonderingly in a kind of foreign atmosphere. Though he snapped into his customary posture of defence, just as mechanically as he had offered to shake hands with Seaforth, his mind was only partly concentrated on his opponent.

In those first few priceless seconds—priceless to Seaforth, at least—there was a hint of startled wonder in Cooper's eyes; something like that of a man who, going absently down a familiar flight of stairs, continues to step down after he has reached the bottom.

And Seaforth was upon him in a twinkling. There was no pause there, no lost motion, no searching or waiting for an opening. Seaforth knew what he had to do and he began at the beginning.

A jab, a feint, a sudden, baffling shift, a crossed right and a heavy left to the body; a smother of blows at close quarters as Cooper covered up, then a straightening upper-cut followed instantly by a nasty hook that spun Cooper sidewise; and dropped him in an odd, curled-up fashion upon his face.

SEAFORTH stepped back and drew a long, deep breath. His eyes had a new glint in them. His lips, slightly parted, were drawn tightly across his teeth, and, quite apparently, he was no longer bored.

Though he might have had a dislike for the proceedings before they began, there was no question about him being in his element once he was under way.

The canoe-boys, squatting on the bank, chattered excitedly among themselves, and the headman, who held the lantern, forgot he was a lamp-post, and lowered the light as if instinct told him where the spot-light ought to be.

Cooper lay upon his face, counting. The numbers came to him at first in a far-off whispering voice, from somewhere in the back of his head. He was not thinking, as he might readily have done, of his luck. Not then. Habit, in such an emergency, put numbers on the tip of his tongue, even though, just then, there was no one holding a watch.

"One — two — three — four—five—" the numbers became louder and louder—"six—seven—eight—"

Cooper leaped up quickly and away, Seaforth following with a rush that had all the effect of a whirlwind and a battering ram.

But this time there was a difference. Cooper was dazed a bit and hurt not a little, and slower than he might have been. But, at least, there was nothing new or strange about such a condition. In fact, as he might have confessed with a grim and bitter smile, it was a condition with which his luck, on two important and comparatively recent occasions, had made him quite familiar. And he was a long way from being unable to defend himself in circumstances of the sort.

He met Seaforth's rush flat-footed. His hands made just the merest gesture of defence as his head slipped inside a straight left and weaved, with an absurdly gentle motion, outside a viciously following right hook. Then, with a light staying jab to Seaforth's face he was away again, and waiting for his opponent to repeat.

Seaforth, slightly off balance as a result of his own efforts, and feeling as if a mosquito had stung his mouth, established his equilibrium quickly enough, but did not repeat. This time he approached Cooper more carefully, cautiously in fact, drawing deep, hissing breaths between his teeth.

Cooper backed away, circling, and each step he took seemed a part of an intricate figure that, carefully studied, was simply and flawlessly executed. Always, on a second's notice, his feet were in a position to carry him into an attack or lead him safely away in retreat; and suddenly, with just a slight swaying twist of his body, he darted in.

It was like the lean sharp flight of the dragon-fly, baffling in its suddenness and its straight-to-the-mark accuracy. He jabbed Seaforth's mouth in the irritatingly painful one-two fashion, dug a cork-screw over the heart, moved his head in that same weaving, gentle way clear of an angrily savage upper-cut that swished harmlessly past his ear, and then, as if he were completing a movement, threw his weight lightly from his right foot to his left and glided away.

The blows had stung more than they had harmed, but the glint in Seaforth's eyes became icy-cold. The muscles of his left forearm, thrust straight out in front of him, bulged and stiffened like tightly drawn cords; which indicated too great a tension for really effective hitting power.

However, he did not alter the measured pace of his pursuit of Cooper in the least. He knew he had the advantage of weight and the punch, and his speed had ever been his greatest aid in winning school and college championships; but he also knew, on this luridly arranged occasion that he was only an amateur testing his amateur skill against a professional.

Seaforth had no doubt of this; not now. It had all become suddenly and astonishingly clear to him when, landing neither right nor left in the second exchange, he had instead been lightly and carelessly jabbed and thereby invited to try again. This, by a man who had been flat on his face a few seconds before.

Amateurs did not box that way; not many of them. And whatever doubt might have lingered in his mind about the matter, the second jabbing invitation dispelled completely; and every move of Cooper's now, spoke to Seaforth in a professional tongue.

Thus, a young man who had succeeded in drinking himself out of college championship, a degree and a love affair, all in the short space of a few months; who had come out to West Africa in the hope that, the world well lost, he could pleasantly and dramatically achieve an obituary notice that would indicate how, on the far-flung outposts of Empire, he had died with a song on his lips; this young man now faced the disagreeable and altogether undramatic possibility of arriving at the A. P. A. beach in Warri with his countenance in an unpresentable condition. Professionals, as he knew, had a nasty trick of leaving their trademark behind them.

Also, Seaforth had a thought or two about the family honor, which, in West African white society, was considerable. His brother, the A. P. A. agent at Bonny, would feel keenly his defeat at the hands of a Marsden man. His cousin on the Gold Coast, from whom he had learned a great deal of the science of self-defence, would be terribly cut up about it, and his uncle, who had been a Northern Nigerian resident commissioner for so long, would be as sensitive about the miserable business as if it were a black mark against his own spotless and imperishable record.

And Cooper, watching Seaforth's slow advance, was thinking of his luck—the bad kind.

Twice, because the dates had been against him, he had lost his chance at a title. The first of these fights had been lost on a questionable decision, but lost for all that, principally because he had been afraid of his luck and consequently afraid to take the aggressive sort of chances he should have taken to win decisively.

And the second and really the easier fight of the two, had ended with the count of ten which Cooper had been in no condition to hear. His feet had been like leaden weights that night and his arms had had a numb, tired and drooping feeling in them that had made him strongly suspect drugs, but this theory did not serve as much of an excuse afterward—not even to himself.

It finished him. It was the grand and inglorious climax. Instead of being in the championship class, he had become a second-rater; an ordinary preliminary fighter, clever and dangerous upon occasion, but erratic and unreliable as to results, and cursed with streaks of bad luck that were not a good investment for a fight manager's money.

Therefore, this young man, who was the antithesis of his present opponent, had also, of necessity and for the purposes of forgetting things he did not want to remember, turned his steps away from a throne to become submerged in the jungles of the Black continent.

He had no intention of dying and had no thoughts at all on the subject of obituary notices. But he was wondering a great deal about his luck, and trying to decide how, in spite of it, he could possibly win. And he wanted to win; not so much to beat Seaforth now, although this was important enough, as to beat the luck.

If he could beat it just once—this time!

If he could do this, why, he would chuck this palm oil game before he started, go back where he belonged and, beginning all over again, show 'em he belonged at the top. He had it in him; knew he had. And he also knew where his heart lay. In this —— jungle swamp, messing around with palm oil and niggers and quinine and fever, he wouldn't be worth the price of the passage home when his two years were up.

For, it was no use trying to forget. He knew that now. The thing was a part of him; in his blood; always had been and there was just one way to get it out, and that was to fight it out.

Fight! Fight now! And —— the luck!

PERHAPS Seaforth, in his cautious, stiff-armed advance upon Cooper, sensed something of this mental regeneration. Perhaps he read in the slight upward tilt of Cooper's chin the prophecy of his own ignominious defeat. But his expression became, if anything, more icily cold because of it; and when Cooper suddenly stopped retreating, Seaforth's advance jerked sharply to a halt and he found himself, psychologically if not altogether pugilistically, on the defensive.

Cooper came right in. He glided rather than stepped straight into the ready bombardment of Seaforth's heavier fists, carefully protecting his body, but giving his face, apparently, no protection at all. And when he had feinted Seaforth into leading, and had rolled his head inside the blow, he made no effort to counter; not even to jab.

Seaforth was startled. He knew he had been tricked and that his lead had missed; and instinctively he had pulled his head back to lessen the force of the blow Cooper should have landed in such circumstances. But nothing happened, nothing except Cooper standing flat footed just a little more than arm's-length away.

Seaforth paused a second, then rushed, his arms working like piston rods. For, whatever the outcome, he knew now that this was his only chance.

To beat Cooper down by sheer weight and the punch; to stake everything on a minute or two of concentrated hitting; to defend himself as best he could, and hit and keep hitting, and allow the law of averages to see to it that he did not miss them all.

Cooper sidestepped just a little; then a little more, carrying Seaforth with him in a circle. His head weaved and rolled this way and that, gently and easily, or slid under a swing just as if flying fist and ducking head were parts of a mechanism that operated that way. And his feet did not dance. They shuffled; now an inch or so back or forward, now an inch or so to right or left, while a volley of fists swished past his ears, passed harmlessly over his shoulders and under his arms or came to an abrupt and painful halt upon his elbows.

The headman with the lantern did not altogether appreciate this kind of thing; neither did the gaping blacks in the canoe. But Seaforth did. Every second of it. He had enjoyed many sensations in his short life, but he had never enjoyed the sensation of being exhibited as a fool. And, strictly speaking, he was not enjoying it now.

There was, in truth, death in the cup, and it was not by any means a wonderful death to die.

His breath was becoming shorter and shorter, and his singlet was soaked with perspiration. The thick, heavy warmth of the tropical night pressed like a dead weight across his shoulders, and crept bit by bit down his tired arms; and when he had again tried the combination of a feint, a shift and a crossed right, and found that Cooper had shifted, too, he tried to fall into a clinch, wondering at the same time, in a far-off, puzzled fashion, why Cooper did not strike.

Cooper struck.

The blow, a short hook under the right eye, rocked Seaforth back on his heels. And a long time afterward—about half a minute perhaps—Seaforth was vaguely reminded of a dream in which a cooper's hammer had pounded endlessly at the head end of a cask-like coffin—round and round and round without pause.

There was blood upon Seaforth's face. It trickled out of his mouth and from a gash under his right eye, and he saw no reason why he should stand upon his feet, allowing Cooper to pound his face into a pulp, because his legs were dead below the knees.

But he did stand, defending himself as best he could and purely by instinct, until a boring right over the heart made him cough thickly, while his legs folded up like a jack-knife.

The chattering in the canoe stopped abruptly, and the lantern-holder again lowered the light as Cooper, with a "strictly business" expression upon his face, stepped back and waited for Seaforth to get up.

Seaforth rested upon his hands and knees, shaking his head in a jerky, spasmodic fashion to clear it. His breath came in wheezing, whistling gasps, and the dead weight of the night across his shoulders pressed down more heavily than ever as if it would crush him completely.

All about him, the stolid face of the bush looked in upon him, seeing all, saying nothing; and even the canoe-boys, when they spoke at all, now spoke in whispers.

Cooper waited. His businesslike expression was still with him, but behind all this was a smile; not of derision, nor of triumph, but of unbelief.

Deliberately he had tested his luck to the rim of destruction; deliberately he had invited danger of the most dangerous sort, and again and again had avoided it by a hair's breath; deliberately, taking chance after chance, he had compelled Seaforth furiously to fling away his strength upon empty air. And now, the weight and the speed and the punch and the luck were at Cooper's feet, creeping on all fours, trying to get up again.

Mentally, Cooper gasped. He glanced at the headman with the lantern as if he thought he might be able to explain it; over toward the canoe-boys squatting in wonderment at the water's edge, then back at Seaforth who, floundering up a little, sagged back again when he found his legs would not support him.

Cooper still waited. He had no suggestions to offer, and he knew Seaforth would resent any kind of assistance. And presently Seaforth began to rise, as it seemed, an inch at a time, swaying this way and that, his arms thrown up in a mockery of defence, his blood-smeared face turned toward the conqueror.

Cooper circled a few steps and Seaforth turned his body laboriously to follow.

"I'm not out yet." The voice was just a thick muttering whisper. "No—not yet." Cooper stepped in warily. He had seen too many men fooled by an assumption of weakness, and, curiously enough, he was taking no chances now. So he shot his left lightly to Seaforth's jaw; just a tap.

And, to his lasting amaze, Seaforth grunted, swayed and flung forward upon his face and stayed there.

The power of suggestion, more mighty than the naked fist, had saved Cooper a nasty but necessary duty.

IT NEVER occurred to Cooper to investigate the why and the wherefore of the apparently deserted mud hut at the back of the clearing. He never did go into strange places of any kind until he saw some one else go in first; and under these present circumstances nothing was farther from his mind. He was too much occupied with the business of getting Seaforth back into the canoe and having the headman start the paddle-boys off again.

Consequently he did not know that the hut was a ju-ju hut; a place of black magic where justice and right frustrated the machinations of the evil spirits of land and water, by the smell of burning egret feathers and by keeping captive a golden lizard with a blue head, anchored to a plantain and a paddle blade stuck in the ground.

The egret feathers burned under the nose of a god of misfortune that had a throne of wood and clay; and the golden lizard with the blue head was a delight in the sight of a benignant deity that occupied a pedestal of crudely cut blackstone; grim gods of the swamps that warred in the dark and creeping hours of the night so that the bellies of the sons of men might be fat or lean according to the result of the battle.

So long as the egret feathers burned; so long as the golden lizard was anchored to the plantain; so long as there was a little tombo in the cup that stood upon an altar of interwoven grasses; so long as there was a drop of fresh blood upon the knife—there was nothing to fear.

And all of these things were just as they should have been, so that only fools whose bellies were filled with gin or palm wine and whose heads were, consequently, the houses of confusion, could possibly meet with misfortune on a night like this.

Therefore, it was perhaps just as well that Cooper was not of the assertively inquisitive type. If he had been, the remainder of his journey to Warri, and his life forever after, would probably have been ruined.

For, of course, he could not carry that ju-ju hut, with its beneficent effects upon the luck, from ringside to ringside.

Seaforth lay upon the matted deck of the canoe. His body ached, his face stung and was stiffening painfully in several prominent places, but the bleeding had stopped and he was almost clean again.

He had had very little to say to Cooper who sat with his knees hunched up, his arms wrapped around them, the lift and dip of the paddles singing a new song in his ears; and Cooper had had just as little to say to him. Words, under the circumstances, did not improve the situation.

Presently, however, Seaforth asked through his puffed lips:

"What was your professional name?"

Cooper's chin, resting on his hunched knees, came up slowly.

"Why?"

"Then you are a professional?"

"What of it?"

"Nothing." A pause. "But if I could fight like that, keep in trim as you do and had your kind of luck, I'd never come out to a place like this."

"Luck?"

"Well, you won more than your share of the sweepstakes, couldn't lose at cards and you don't know what it is to have a thirst. Why, in Heaven's name, did you come out here? This place will make you as slow as a cart-horse in a month."

Cooper smiled faintly.

"I know. I'm going back on the next boat."

"The next—" Seaforth sat up. Back? You're going back on the next boat!"

Cooper nodded and, somehow or other, felt guilty about it.

"Nothing in this for me," he said with an assumption of gruffness he did not feel. "I'm outside. Don't belong."

Seaforth sat looking at Cooper dumbly.

"No," he muttered absently. "No. I suppose not."

Then, slowly he lay down again. And the black loneliness of the night crept in upon him as he thought over and over to himself:

"Going back—on the next boat—on the next boat—going back."

His right arm went up and covered his eyes. But he made no sound. His puffed lips were drawn into a painfully tight line, while his aching body shuddered convulsively every now and then, and his clenched left hand beat softly and secretly, but none the less tensely, upon the matted deck of the canoe.

"Going back! On the next boat. Going back!"

And then Seaforth's whole body stiffened. His teeth were clamped so tightly that his jaws screeched in protest. The arm across his eyes pressed down ruthlessly and the hand that beat upon the deck of the canoe stopped beating.

And out of this, desperately and terribly, in a voice that lifted note on note to the greatest triumph Seaforth would probably ever know, there came a song:

"Just a wee deoch an' doris,
Just a wee yin, that's a',
Just a wee deoch an' doris afore we gang awa',

There's a wee wifie waitin' in a wee butt an' ben,
And if ye can say:
'It's a braw, bricht, moonlicht nicht',
Ye're a' richt, ye ken."

Cooper laughed.

And Seaforth, accepting the compliment at its full value, carried the sound of it with him down into his own self-made hell and made the most of it.

Nevertheless, it was significant that when the A. P. A agent at Warri had ruefully assimilated Seaforth's explanation and condition, and decided to make the best of what had every appearance of being an unusually bad start, Seaforth did not altogether agree with the agent's conception of what the best ought to be.

"Better have a drink and lie down for a bit," the agent suggested out of the great goodness of his heart.

"Thanks. That's decent of you. But—" Seaforth paused, swallowed slowly and shifted his weight from one foot to the other—"I think I'll—er—just lie down."

CODFISH *and* PEMAQUID

by H. P.

ON RETURNING to England in 1585 from his search along the northeast coast of North America for a Northwest Passage John Davis took with him some big codfish caught in the waters around Pemaquid. These big fish stimulated England's desire to know more about the waters where they were caught. To satisfy this curiosity better ships and more sailors were needed, and England rapidly became a nation of sailors. By 1615 the fishing industry was of prime importance to England. Nor were the Grand Banks unknown to the French at an early date, and many an unrecorded act of violence between the two nationalities took place along this coveted stretch of sea coast.

The English Crown left colonial development to land-companies instead of holding it like the French to be a concern of the State. Whether Georges Popham in New England and landed proprietors in the Southern colonies won or lost was a matter of private concern. Pemaquid (Maine) was a place of importance for fisheries and furs at an early date. It was a prosperous settlement before Plymouth was heard of. Captain John Smith walked its streets, and John's Island is called after him. Samoset was there and learned his English before the Pilgrims crossed the sea. Smith in 1614 estimated it would require two hundred ships to carry the cargoes from the Pemaquid district to England.

For years it rivaled Boston in importance. The Jesuits report English at Pemaquid in 1608-9.

But what of its history before this period? Remains of a much older settlement are to be observed. Paved streets that cross each other quite regularly at right angles have been uncovered. Who placed the stones and for what purpose? Grave-stones, dating as early as 1606 (Sewall) were found there. Smith says two vessels crossed the Atlantic from England in 1603. He does not say where they went to. French documents state Pemaquid was the first place of settlement of the English.

It has been suggested that the paved streets were for the passage of guns to the fort, but guns landed at Pemaquid were not so heavy as to require paved roads. Since the first section of paving was observed other pieces of paved thoroughfare have been uncovered some distance up the point.

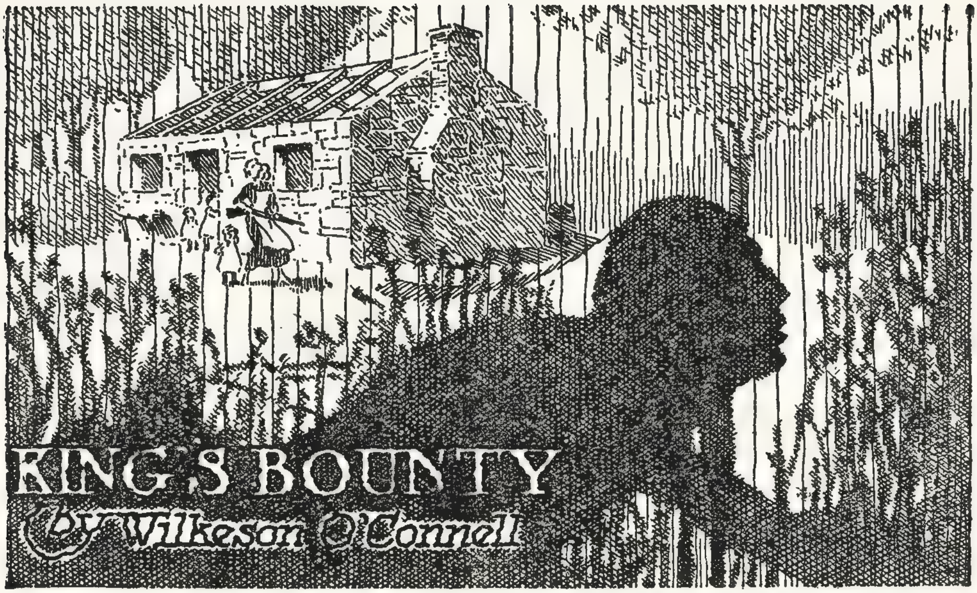
Waymouth was in the Little Pemaquid River in 1605. But back of all these first recorded visits of the English is the probability of rough fisherfolk who ventured across to Monhegan and the codfisheries. And back of that probable visitation is the possibility of a more ancient colony and the building of paved streets. The Indians had no use for paved thoroughfares. Norsemen surely coasted the shores of New England at a very early date. About 1000 A.D. a younger son of Eric the Red is supposed to have reached southern New England, the "Wineland" mentioned by Adam of Bremen in 1069. About the year 1000 A.D. ten Norsemen, tradition has it, were blown by a storm from the North American coast to Ireland where they were made prisoners. But the Norsemen paved no streets at Pemaquid.

If a Norse boat could be blown from west to east to Ireland why could not a boat, say a Roman galley about to return home from ancient Britain, be blown off her course and far into the Atlantic, and make Monhegan and Pemaquid? The Romans were famous road-builders and went prepared to build roads when venturing to new lands. Could early Romans have laid the paved street?

At the camp-fire of Arthur S. Hoffman and Talbot Mundy on the shore of a Maine lake I suggested this theory in 1911. Mr. Hoffman suggested I write a novel, showing the storm-blown galley reaching the Indian kingdom of "Pemacuit," and being attacked by the natives; of their numbers dwindling by sickness and violent death. Fancifully we played with the idea.

I could see a red-headed amazon, queen of a fierce tribe, embarking as a captive for Rome. The storm. The coming to a new land. The methodical building of roads. The attack. The faring south to Rhode Island. The last stand of the last two survivors, the Roman captain and his prisoner, who fought valiantly by his side.

Codfish brought English persistency to New England. Can History ever assure us that a storm brought the paved streets to Pemaquid?



KING'S BOUNTY

by Wilkeson O'Connell

"GOOD morning, uncle!" again lisped Cicely from the threshold.

"—— and the furies!" continued Colonel Sinclair, his voice pitched excitedly. "How the —— does he expect me to carry on this campaign if he doesn't send me anything to do it with? What the —— does he think we're employing? Fair words and holy water? Where the —— am I to raise—"

"Good morning, uncle!"

But Cicely's silvery tones were once more lost, this time in the asthmatic growl of the pursy, ungirt captain of colonial troops who had entered just before her.

"Bad news from Sir Frederick, along with the lady?" asked this one.

"Of the worst!" he was answered. "Conceive, Detweiller—" the colonel's anger degenerated into pathos—"he sent but half of what I asked for, saying that I might raise the rest among the loyal people of this province!"

"To whom it is owing," said the fat captain. "There's gratitude for you! Here we are, conducting the only effective campaign of the whole bloody war, doing more toward the subjection of York Colony than Howe and Clinton combined, and then he cuts short our supplies!" Slowly his cold wrath gathered. "By ——, we can get along without the luxuries of British generals, British strategy, white bread and fresh beef, but we got to have money, powder and shot! Why don't some one explain as much to that old goat in Montreal?"

"Captain Detweiller!"

The colonel expostulated on behalf of the general in command of the Canadas as well as for the honor of the service.

"Ain't no use in denying it, Colonel," said the colonial, bumping himself down into a rush-bottomed chair and letting his belt out another hole to give more room and comfort. "He is an old goat, and by this he's put us in a —— ugly position with the Iroquois. What you going to do about it?"

The colonel paused for consideration; and Cicely saw the opportunity as her own.

"Good morning, uncle!"

The two men turned to face her as, with some difficulty, she maneuvered her hoop through the doorway, which was cut narrowly in the two-foot thick wall, for the purpose of keeping out hostiles. Like a golden galleon under a full suit of rose silk sails, she bore down upon them and collapsed at her uncle's feet in the curtsey that an exigent etiquette demanded. Sweeping upward, she received his kiss upon her brow and explained her uninvited presence.

" 'Twas mopish above stairs, so I thought I'd break my fast with you. I—I did not know you were in company."

And she turned a well-bred stare on the shapeless, tan-clad captain.

Frontier fashion, he met her gaze without rising, but lowering his own eyes and the churchwarden he had been packing.

"My niece, Mistress Cicely Sinclair—Captain Detweiller, of the Rangers," said her guardian.

And Cicely again crumpled to the floor before the captain of colonials, who rose, bowed and said nothing, because he had nothing to say.

"I breakfasted two hours since, child," went on Sinclair. "In the wilderness we do not keep London hours."

"No matter," said Cicely airily as she regained her equilibrium. "So did I. 'Twas but an excuse to join you."

"Your arrival, child," said the colonel, his smile warming as he looked at her, "will lighten this exile."

"La, but my uncle is monstrous polite to say so!" returned Cicely. She peacocked away from them, speaking over one shoulder. "How like you my sack? 'Tis the latest French mode, or was so seven weeks since. Does it not become me?"

The fat captain was occupied in striking a light for his pipe, so it was her uncle who answered, "Vastly," while he smiled again at the contrast of the powdered, painted, daintily artificial piece of London vanity that moved against the rough-cast walls of the King's House—which had been built to keep out hostiles. But he had other things to think of besides the set of a Watteau pleat, and presently he said so.

"We are engaged on His Majesty's affairs, Cissy. Possess thyself in patience till the sun is lower, and then I will show thee the fort. You may find it amusing."

"But all I wish, now, is to sit with you and watch the passing," began Cicely somewhat disconsolately.

"And 'tis just that that thee may not do," said the colonel. "But if you are lonely, you may watch the passing from the window of the next room. And when our discussion and the business of the morning is finished, we will join thee. Will that content thee?"

He spoke as to an obedient child; and, as he expected, she resigned herself sweet-temperedly.

"Needs must, I fear," she said.

Giving him the tips of fingers, she permitted him to hand her to the next room and a Windsor chair that stood by a window. Through this might be seen the plain where all the morning businesses of the frontier fortress were proceeding in a shimmer of midsummer heat. He bowed. She curtseyed, and then exclaimed as her eye was taken by something without:

"La, as I live, there's a man with a tail to his hat! Is't a Mohawk, sir?"

"A blue-eyed one," said her uncle, bending to peer through the casement. "Gad, Detweiller, the fort's fair swarming with men who've come to claim king's bounty! Could anything be more unfortunate?"

"Terwilliger's at the door below, now," said the fat captain, his husky voice coming from near the window of the next room.

"La!" repeated Cicely, staring. "I thought they were always black-eyed!"

"Not—not all of them," said the colonel, peculiarly.

"I wish—I wish," said Cicely idly, "that I might see that one closer at hand. He looks purely amusing."

"You would not find him so." And the colonel's tone was grimly final.

He lost himself in discontented reflections while Cicely looked through the generously cut door that was between the rooms to the narrow one that led into the passage. A soldier servant stood there, announcing, "A scout in from Schoharie, sir," to Detweiller. He was curtly ordered to show the wood-runner up. And then the captain sat himself down at the rude table on which writing implements, dispatch boxes and a great ledger were lying.

"Better make up your mind, Colonel, what you going to do about the bounties 'fore he comes up," said Detweiller.

"Gad, is there more than one thing I can do?" inquired the colonel, turning from his niece. "Look sharp, child," he added from the doorway, "and I'll grant so much of your wish. But he isn't amusing."

The farther door opened, and Cicely saw the resilient figure of a man of thirty-five or forty years of age, as he advanced to the table with a slovenly salute. Then, after the ceremonious bow, her uncle closed the door between the rooms so politely that the tongue of the latch never clicked.

LONELINESS invaded Cicely, and she fixed her thought on the man she had glimpsed a moment since. He had swayed poisedly as he walked with head held vigilantly and toes turned in, carrying the long rifle across one elbow, as if it were a part of himself.

The head had been long and lean and beautifully boned; the eyes cold and gray as ice on a pond; the nostrils thin and quivering with the quiet rush of his breath; the mouth, above the square cut, deeply cleft, clean-shaven chin, no more than a rigid slit; and the skin that had shown through the neck of his hunting shirt that was unlaced against the heat, had been, not like the stretched bronze of his face, but white as her own throat.

It was a perfect face in its lean economy. But it had made Cicely feel more lonesome. She found it difficult to define the exact quality of it, but her mind framed the word at last. It was "pitiless." Indeed, this woodsman was not proving amusing. She recalled he had flung something dark in color on to the table, and wondered, rather incuriously, what it might have been.

From the next room came the wordless sounds of conversation; a high, clear, Norman nasal tone being added to those of her uncle's crisp, English voice and Captain Detweiller's asthmatic drawl. Thus heard, they seemed oddly far away—not in the same building, not real, even then nothing seemed real. Neither this hot, lakeside wilderness, nor cool, far England itself.

Cicely, looking across the parade to where the red walls shivered in the noon, turned desperately homesick. She leaned back in the Windsor, the sun streaming in the window upon the wadded, golden silk of her petticoat. She pushed the chair back restlessly. There was a quiet click, and words suddenly detached themselves from the formless sound. She turned, in relief, and saw the door silently swinging open. Through it the scout was shown, still standing by the table, from which was trailing, till it touched the floor, the long, black object she had failed to identify before. It seemed no more than a horse's mane.

"—if ye won't wait for it," Detweiller was drawling. "But what's your haste?"

"I want to get back to the building of my new house," said the scout. "When I left in June, the roof timbers had just been set, and now it must be sheathed and shingled against the autumn storms."

"Where you settling, now?" asked Detweiller—as if to gain time, it sounded to Cicely.

"In the fork of Canada Creek," answered the scout. "It's pretty far off the trail, but the land is main fine."

"Family there yet?" asked the captain.

"Some. I moved my wife and the four eldest out last May. They're working a patch or two for me."

"Alone?" Then he hinted, "Ain't you feared?"

"Naw!" said Terwilliger. "It's new-opened land, and nobody, least of all the rebels, knows they're there."

"Well, I hope you stay fixed," said Detweiller. "It's the third time, to my knowledge, that you've settled."

"Got to stay this time," said Terwilliger, and he laughed grimly but with a queer tone of pride under the casual indifference. "It's a stone house I've built—the first in that valley, and right and tight as the one at Herkimer, or Johnson Hall itself! It's taken me three years to get the walls raised. And now, God willing, we'll live in it this winter."

There was pause, and he added, as if repeating—

"Eighty pounds, Captain."

DETWEILLER heaved himself into the business on hand.

"Where'd these come from?" he demanded, contempt shading his tone, as he raised what Cicely now saw were three small fleeces of short, blond curls and a long, thick lock of black hair from the table. Her little, painted mouth drew into a circle.

"La!" she whispered, staring and bewildered.

"Sauquoit in Schoharie," answered the scout.

"Hmpt!" commented Detweiller discontentedly. "One is a woman's, and two are children's."

"Oh!" gasped Cicely, almost aloud.

"Family by the name of Verplanck," she heard Terwilliger drawling on. "I made the kill myself, so's not to have to cut up with any one else. Verplanck give me quite a fight, but he was short of powder. After what he had run out, it was easy work enough."

Cicely shuddered under the rose-colored sack.

"And the four of 'em, Captain, will come to eighty pounds."

"There was a Mohawk," said Detweiller slowly. "There was a Mohawk in a fortnight since with a string of seven—all men's. Now, that was something worth!"

"Yes, I heard," admitted Terwilliger. "He crossed the trail of a scouting party in the Oneida country, and tomahawked 'em one by one as they went down to a creek for water. 'Twas luck, rank luck, to strike seven fools in a bunch thataway, and won't hap again this war!"

"Well, there's Noll Prague," went on Detweiller. "He brought in a round dozen last week. All that was left in the settlement at Shell's Bush."

"Only two come from there, howsomever," said Terwilliger, disdainfully. "He's been eight months collecting that string, while I've come in every fortnight, besides carrying news and dispatches."

"For which services ye've been well paid," said Detweiller. "Too well paid, by ——! Eighty pounds for but a single family! ——'s blood, but it's too much!"

Terwilliger leaned across the table, his eyes narrowing ominously.

"What for are you trying to cheapen my string, Jake Detweiller?" His tone was a sudden insolence. "I've done the hunting, now you do the salting according to agreement!"

"I reckon, Terwilliger," drawled Detweiller, still more slowly, "that ye may as well know now as later that ye ain't a-going to get more than twelve pound a piece for that there string."

"According to the general order—"

"I'm sorry, my man," the colonel's cool voice cut in. "But the order is abrogated. I received dispatches from Sir Frederick last night, saying that in London they held the bounty was too large at twenty, and that His Majesty's ministers would authorize no more than twelve for the future."

With calculated violence Terwilliger lost his temper.

"Then —— His Majesty's ministers and His Majesty, too, afore I put one foot in front of t'other in their service again!"

Cicely half rose, looking for some other exit than the door between the rooms. But there was none. Terwilliger slapped two fingers against the edge of the table and raged on.

"How do they expect me to live? Three months ago at planting time, I was wood-running for you and Sir John, and now there is naught to harvest. We're like to starve next winter, lessen His Majesty's ministers pay me what they promised when they took me out of my field. And food's dear in these times. In June I was ordered to leave my new, stone house but half-finished, the roof not on, the beams rotting in the rain, to do service for His Majesty's ministers. And for nigh two months my wife and the childer have lived unprotected in a wilderness, with every chance of being found and molested by some wood-running rebel, or sneaking, snooping, preying Oneida. While I was off being cozened by His Majesty's ministers!

"No, by ——, it ain't a-going to do! Ye forget, Jake Detweiller, that I be bound and branded in the three-fold bond of the Bear, and sit as a sachem at the council-fire of the Senecas. 'Twas I that set that tribe on to the border, and the Cayugas with 'em. And I can call 'em off, ay, and set 'em on again on a different scent! If I can put no dependence on His Majesty's ministers!"

The paunchy captain seemed totally unmoved.

"Ye could do naught of the sort," he told the boaster calmly. "Granting ye could swing the council, which I don't, the rebels would never accept what ye offered 'em. They might take the Senecas. But for ye and the rest of us Loyalists, they've nothing but short shrift and a hempen collar, whether we come with red belts or black. And well ye know it!"

"Maybe so, maybe not," said Terwilliger, returning to his calm. "But anyways, I can call 'em off the war-trail. And then who'll put down the rebellion? Some fat-headed Britisher, like Burgoyne? Or Gage? Or His Majesty's ministers?"

There was a short exclamation from the colonel, followed by a wheezy chortle from Detweiller. Terwilliger, quick to note any advantage, turned to the latter persuasively.

"Come, now, Captain, don't ye go to do me! Ye know I've done good service these four years past. So pay me what was agreed to when I went on the trail in the spring."

"I know ye have," said Detweiller, meeting him more than half way. "None have done better. But—"

He paused, and the colonel took up the sentence.

"But we can't pay you more than we pay the others, Terwilliger, and I haven't got the cash to pay all at twenty. That id—that is, Sir Frederick did not send me the monies I asked him for, so we're unexpectedly short. Still—" he hesitated calculatingly—"I believe we've got enough to pay twenty for the buck scalps, possibly, and twelve for the other sorts."

"Take it or leave it," said Detweiller, when Terwilliger did not snap at the offer.

"Well," said the latter slowly, "make it twenty for men's and women's and twelve for the little ones, and I will take it."

"Curse me, but you're a close bargainer!" exclaimed the colonial, while he waited for the colonel's decision.

Cicely pressed her hand against her bodice, and lay back in the curve of the Windsor. The hot square of sunlight had again crept over her knees, but she did not notice it.

"Why, lookee," the scout was pointing out, "ye don't stand to lose much. There be more of the little ones than of the other two put together."

"That's so, Colonel," confirmed Detweiller.

As the colonel hesitated, there was a knock at the passage door, and the soldier servant announced that there was a redskin below, demanding bounty. Sinclair ordered that he be shown up, and hurriedly agreed to Terwilliger's compromise.

"I believe the supply will last, even at that rate. Lord knows I don't want to stint you! Take down the record, Detweiller, and pay Terwilliger sixty-four pounds. Gad, how hot it is!"

Detweiller wrote something in the great ledger, opened a dispatch-box and then paused thoughtfully.

"Guess I won't pay ye," he said to Terwilliger, "till the buck comes in for his. That'll show him we're dealing square, in the reduction, to red and white alike."

Terwilliger nodded, and Cicely, feeling as if the very air had fainted, closed her eyes for a long, weak moment. When she opened them again, they met the little blood-shot orbs of a Cayuga warrior who was silently crossing the farther threshold. Blankly these were withdrawn, and she shuddered again in the heat. There were appropriate greetings passing in the next room, and then the sullen, sodden, greasy, paint-smeared buck demanded, in a tongue she could not comprehend, one hundred pounds for the four little scalps and the larger one of long, brown-stained, ash-blond locks, that he laid on the table.

With admirable patience, half in English, half in Iroquois, Detweiller explained, over and over again, the change in tariff and necessity for it. Terwilliger, who seemed familiar with the Cayuga, kept putting in a word when Detweiller hesitated, as if he were assisting the captain with a strange dialect. Cicely could understand but one word in ten, but all too well she comprehended the meaning of the whole. She bowed her powdered head to her hands and wondered dully when she would be able to leave the trap-like, blazing hot room.

"Show him the sun, Captain," suggested Terwilliger suddenly. "That may change his mind for him. Remember, he's got some influence with the young men."

"If he hadn't, do ye think I'd be taking all this trouble?" asked Detweiller, fatly impatient, as he counted out sixty-eight pounds in sovereigns and pushed them across the board to the Indian who, with prompt insolence, refused the gold.

"Leave it there, and pay Terwilliger," suggested the colonel from his place by the window.

DETWEILLER carelessly tossed the string of blond scalps to their then proprietor and conspicuously counted out sixty-four pounds from the money box for Terwilliger. The latter received them and flung his string upon the table in such a way the Cayuga could not fail to note for what he was being paid. The scout then thanked the colonel with marked, if informal, courtesy, saluted as before and moved toward the door. The warrior turned and spoke to him quickly; there was a short colloquy in Iroquois, and Terwilliger returned to the table.

"He says he'll take the sixty-eight," he announced, "since everybody's being paid at the same rate."

The Cayuga grunted an affirmation, and Detweiller told over the coin into the little, greasy, bronze-brown palm. The string of blond scalps was returned to him, and he picked up the pen to make out the records.

> "Four scalps, one man's, one woman's, two children's, August 9, at Sauquoit in Schoharie, by Duane Terwilliger. Paid £64.

He muttered aloud as he wrote and cursed the quill for his own unhandiness.

"Now, then, brother—"

And he glanced up at the Indian who

broke into an avalanche of guttural, rasping Iroquois. Detweiller looked blank.

"Better 'terpret, Terwilliger," he suggested. "I can't follow the western tongues and work this cursed pen at one and the same time."

"He's saying his name's White Eyes and that he's a Wolf of the Cayugas," said Terwilliger.

Detweiller wrote the name down while the Iroquois rasped steadily on. Then the captain looked to the scout inquiringly.

"He's just telling how he come by this here stringful," explained Terwilliger.

"Go on, give us the whole tale," said the captain of colonials.

Cicely threw back her head and set her teeth.

"Well, he took the war-trail alone, a while back," said Terwilliger, obligingly, White Eyes pausing to let him catch up with himself in the narrative. "He followed it for a week. Then he come to a lodge, off by itself in a clearing."

The Iroquois commenced again; Terwilliger translating literally, phrase for phrase.

" 'A white woman stood in the doorway of the lodge,' which shows it must have been a house or a cabin," Terwilliger interpolated.

" 'She saw White Eyes creeping through the grasses. She shot at him with the long rifle. All that she killed was his shadow. He buried his tomahawk in her skull. He took her scalp. There were four cubs in the cabin. He took their scalps. Many scalps hang at his lodge pole. He ought to have got a hundred pounds for such a kill.' And the rest is just boasting, and nothing to the point."

"Where'd this happen?" asked Detweiller. "He left that out."

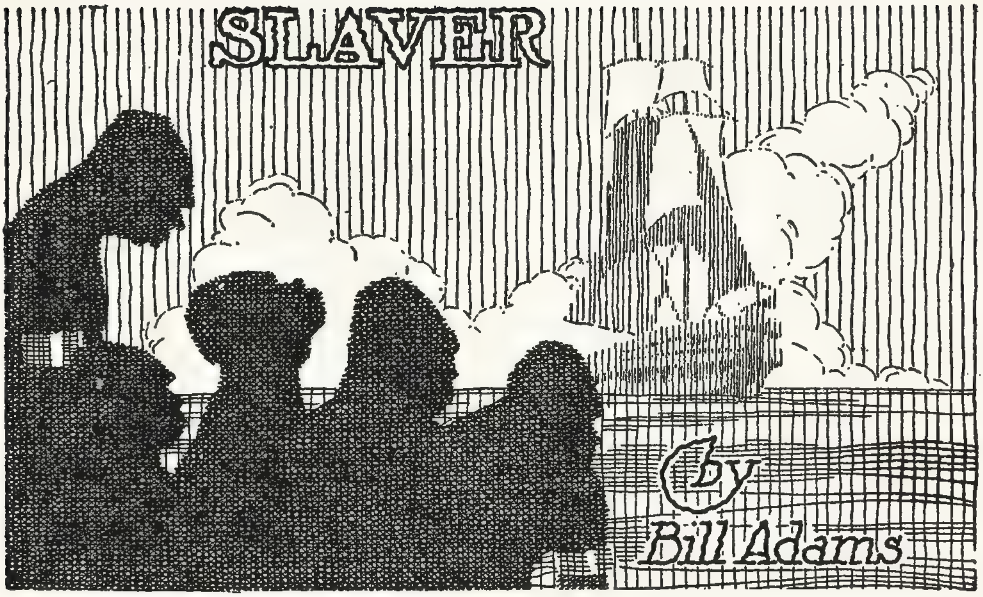
White Eyes flung an arm to the eastward, and Detweiller dipped the quill.

"Little Valley north of Great Valley," the Iroquois grunted in his bastard English. "Lodge at fork of Canada Creek. Stone house—not finished—rain come through top."

Second after second the pen hung above the paper. Not a sound intruded on the white hot noon that seemed but a part of the silence. Eternity was tinging the agony of the pause when Cicely rustled to her knees, bringing it abruptly to an end.

"Oh, ho, ho—ha, ha!" she laughed, with an odd, gasping intake between each chortle. "Oh, ho, ho—ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Tears, stained with carmine, were dripping on to her bosom, as she rocked and swayed and chuckled at the grim, jesting justice of Red gods.



SLAVER

by Bill Adams

Author of "The Helmsman of the Mandarin," "Old Sea-Flower," etc.

IT WAS as the year 1860. I was steward of the brigantine *Bantam,* and about to sail on my first voyage. I was twenty-five, and but for my father should long ago have gone to sea. My father was an apothecary in the port of Bristol, and for as long as he had lived I had helped him in his shop. It was owing to illness that now, a few months after his death, I was bound for salt water. The doctor advising a change of occupation, had suggested a voyage. Still weak from my illness, my face as pale as a bed sheet, I had signed as steward of the *Bantam.*

Whither the *Bantam* was bound I had no idea; neither had Mr. Toms, her mate. She lay at a Bristol wharf with her canvas aloft, but without cargo or crew. Mr. Toms and I were the only people aboard. She had changed hands since we had been engaged, and her late master, leaving her, had left Mr. Toms in charge of her deck and me to look after her storeroom.

Mr. Toms was a tall and bony sailor of around thirty-five. Though he had been a lieutenant in the navy, he spoke to me as though we were equals. The brigantine had come to Bristol from the West Indies with sugar, rum, and coconuts, and seated together upon the after skylight we had been wondering whither she would sail.

It was high water and the muddy Avon river was bank high for a spring tide. A smart corvette passed down stream as we sat there, fresh paint upon her yard-arms and the polish bright upon her guns.

Mr. Toms stared at the corvette, and as she slipped by us an officer who appeared on her quarterdeck saw him and waved a hand.

"Hello, Toms!" he called.

The mate of the brigantine waved a reply, with a queer deprecating gesture.

"She's off to the African patrol," he said.

While I wondered how it came that a gentleman who had been an officer in the navy was now mate of a trading brigantine, he turned to me as though he had divined my thoughts.

"Steward, what brings you here?" he asked.

I told him of my late illness, and old desire for the sea; then asked him point blank why he had left the navy.

He flushed a little, but, meeting my eye, said:

"Too much rum, boy. It got the better of me," and added, as he left me, "Keep that to yourself."

Early next morning the master appeared. As he passed my pantry door he gave me a sharp glance; then called the mate and bade him be ready to go to sea as soon as the hands came aboard.

"Slaver," copyright, 1925, by Bill Adams.

"You've got a crew, sir?" asked Mr. Toms.

"I always pick my men myself," replied the master.

"Where are you bound for, Captain Dance?" asked the mate.

"Sealed orders, Mister," answered the master.

When Mr. Toms was gone to the deck the master ordered me to fetch him a toss of brandy. He was a powerfully built man of about forty, with a face the color of muddy sand. On his left cheek, an old purple smallpox scar ran to a point below the eye. His thin hair was tow-colored, and a long fine beard grew high toward his cheekbones. His pale and watery eyes had a way of blinking.

"How long have you been with the ship?" he asked me.

"It is my first voyage, sir," I replied.

Raising his brows in surprize he asked—

"How does that come?"

I told him that I was come to the sea for my health's sake; and, his fingers clutching his brandy glass, he sat before me with a look of annoyance on his face.

"What's been your business?" he demanded.

"I am an apothecary, sir," I said, and at that he gave me a searching look.

"You know something of doctoring then, eh?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," I replied. "I grew up in my father's shop and he was an apothecary before me."

"All right. You'll do," he said.

I disliked his thin, almost invisible lips, his weak but domineering eyes.

"She'll be at sea in an hour or two," he said, and tossed the brandy down. Something prompted me to ask him the question that Mr. Toms had asked—

"Where are we bound, sir?"

He stared at me and, frowning at what he evidently considered impudence upon a steward's part, bade me go about my business. So I went to the cook-house abaft the foremast with a supply of stores for the cook. The cook came over the rail as I reached the cook-house, and at his heels the sailors. Mr. Toms stood watching them as they came aboard, and it was plain to me that he did not care too much for their appearance.

Having tossed their belongings into the topgallant forecastle, they returned to the deck and went about obeying Mr. Toms' orders as though those orders came from a machine rather than from a man. They paid no heed to him with glance or with reply, but, jesting in undertones amongst themselves, cast off the brigantine's moorings in a seaman-like and self-sufficient manner.

When the *Bantam* came to the sea at Avonmouth, she caught a fine breeze from northwest and slipped away at a good clip. She passed a tall merchant ship as though the ship were at a standstill, and, toward evening, picked up another sail ahead which proved when we overhauled her at nightfall to be the corvette that had gone to sea the previous evening.

When a lieutenant upon the navy craft waved and called to Mr. Toms by name Captain Dance turned to our mate.

"Those fellows friends of yours, mister?" he asked.

Mr. Toms flushed as he replied—

"An old acquaintance, sir."

"Where are you bound?" shouted the officer from the corvette.

"Tell him Port Royal," said the master, and Mr. Toms replied accordingly.

In a few minutes the corvette was lost in the darkness astern.

I was early up next morning and went to the poop. Mr. Toms was walking up and down, and the *Bantam*, in a fresh wind, raced through the green sea.

"How many days to Port Royal, sir?" I asked the mate.

He beckoned me to a point out of sight of the helmsman.

"She's not bound for Port Royal," he said. "We're heading south."

"Why, sir," said I, "Captain Dance—"

Mr. Toms glanced through the open skylight as though to make sure that no one was below to overhear him, but as he turned to me again the master appeared on the quarterdeck below.

"Steward," he called, "bring up a drink for me and the mate."

As I went below he ascended the poop ladder amidships.

When I took the two glasses up Mr. Toms said— "I don't drink at sea, sir."

"You don't?" said Captain Dance, with a queer look, and, adding, "I do," tossed both the drinks down.

"We're heading south, sir," said Mr. Toms. "Are'nt we bound for Port Royal?"

Captain Dance looked up at him from blinking eyes.

"I don't tell my business to a man-o'-war's-man," said he.

"Mister," he continued, "how'd you like to make a pot of money?"

"Willing enough, sir, if I can make it clean," said the mate, and at his words a cynical smile overspread the master's face.

"You've got the chance," he said. "I'm bound for the slave coast."

Mr. Toms' fingers twitched. His face very red, he turned on Captain Dance.

"I'll not sail with a slaver, sir," said he.

The master laughed and stroked his wavy beard. He looked into Mr. Toms' face.

"You're sailing with one now," he said, and added, "Are'nt you the Toms I've heard of that swore he'd be even with the navy ships for breaking him?"

They stood a moment face to face. For a moment the mate fidgeted nervously, then, clenching his fists, he exclaimed:

"You're joking, sir. You're not outfitted for slaving."

Captain Dance laughed.

"That's easy settled, mister," he answered. "Who'd be fool enough to try to fit for slaving nowadays but from a Yankee port?"

"If you are slaving, sir," the mate said, "I'll have no hand in it."

The helmsman struck the bell and Captain Dance turned and led the way to breakfast. From the quarterdeck there came a sound of noisy laughter and loud jests. An expostulating voice was heard without the cabin, and in a moment there came a rap upon the door.

"See who's there, you," said Captain Dance to me, and I opened the door upon the boatswain, a man named Skinner.

He was a wide, heavy-set sailor and, almost filling the narrow doorway, was forced to stoop a little lest he strike his forehead on the beam above. He looked to Captain Dance with the unperturbed expression of some large, even-tempered beast, and it was not until he stood a little aside that I saw he held a man behind him.

"He come out o' the sail locker, cap'n," he said.

The stowaway, suddenly noticing Mr. Toms, started. Then, giving him a hateful look exclaimed—

"Why, hello, Toms!"

Captain Dance said to the boatswain, "You can go," and bade the stowaway enter the cabin.

"No ill feelin's, Toms, I'm sure," said the stowaway as he shut the door behind him.

CAPTAIN DANCE stared at the fellow. He was slight and dark, with close cropped black hair and beard. His eyes were sneering, and a thin knife scar crossed his forehead diagonally.

"Where did you two meet last?" asked Captain Dance.

"On the Congo," said the stowaway, and the master half rose from his chair and leaned toward him.

"What did you say?" he demanded.

"I said, *sir*, as how Toms, here, and me met up upon the Congo," said the stowaway.

"What were you doing on the Congo?" asked Captain Dance as he sat down again.

"Mate o' the *Lalla Rookh*, sir, loadin' slaves," said the stowaway, and added, " 'Till Toms come along an' put the crimp on business."

"I ain't forgot you, Toms," he continued, "I only broke Bristol jail but four days ago."

The master looked amusedly at Mr. Toms.

"Take your choice, Mister," he said, and to the stowaway. "They broke your friend for using too much rum, and now he doesn't want to handle a black cargo! Settle between you who goes mate with me."

Mr. Toms said, "I'll not sail mate of any slaver," and went out to the quarterdeck.

"So you were mate of *Lalla Rookh*, eh?" asked Captain Dance of the stowaway.

"Yes, sir," he replied, and added, "Ain't you Captain Dance, sir?"

The master nodded.

"I heard tell o' you, an' reckoned you'd be goin' Congoward," said the other. "What flag're you sailin' under, sir?"

Captain Dance shrugged his shoulders.

"Whatever flag comes handiest," he said. "It's the gold I'm after."

"You ain't fitted for slavin' yet, sir?" asked the stowaway.

"I supply at sea," said the master.

"An' you takes me mate, sir?"

Captain Dance nodded.

"An' if they catches us, what?" asked the new mate, his eyes on Mr. Toms, whose figure was visible through the open port.

"Steward," called Captain Dance, "ask Toms to come in here."

I informed Mr. Toms accordingly. He entered the saloon and stood with his eyes on those of the master.

"You'll live with the men," said Captain Dance. "You'll stand watch with them and act according."

Mr. Toms started toward the mate's room.

"Get for'ard, you," said the master, and Mr. Toms, turning, replied—

"I'm going for my things, sir."

"You'll leave them where they are," said Captain Dance, and while the stowaway leered at Mr. Toms added, "They'll do for my new mate. Get for'ard now."

For an instant Mr. Toms, white with anger, looked at the two of them.

"Steward," said Captain Dance, "pass Toms and the mate a toss of brandy each, just to show there's no ill feelings."

He sat there blinking while I handed the stowaway a glass and then gave one to Mr. Toms.

"I've told you, sir, that I don't drink at sea," said Mr. Toms, and lifting the glass that I had handed to him, flung it into the face of the stowaway.

The stowaway wiped his face, from which a trickle of blood mingled with the spirits. His face was distorted with rage, but Captain Dance smiled and said—

"Steady, now, you. What's your name, eh?"

"My name's Frere, sir," exclaimed the stowaway with an oath, and added, "I'll show this renegade what's what."

"You'll obey orders," said the master. "I'll have no fighting on my ship. In a week or two we'll meet our consort. I'll put him aboard her." To Mr. Toms he said, "Get forward, you, and quick about it now."

Frere drank his brandy. When he laid the glass down Captain Dance said:

"Take charge of the ship, Mister, and keep a good lookout for sail. We don't want to be answering questions from the men-o'war's-men."

For two days thereafter I saw nothing of Mr. Toms.

In the evening of the third day, the master ordered all hands mustered aft, and the crew, except for Mr. Toms, who remained walking to and fro on the fore deck, gathered by the poop ladder. As Captain Dance bent to address them there was a sound of scuffling from forward. Mr. Toms and Frere were fighting savagely in front of the cook-house, and Dance came down from the poop and walked forward with the men at his heels.

Skinner, the boatswain, stood directly behind Captain Dance.

Captain Dance turned to the boatswain and, nodding toward Frere, said—

"Take hold of him."

Himself he flung a foot out behind Mr. Toms and, grasping him, jerked him backward so that he stumbled and fell upon the deck. Then, while Skinner kept his clutch upon the mate, the master said—

"You, Frere—go get your things and take them to the forecastle."

To Skinner he said—

"Take your stuff to the mate's room. You're mate."

Captain Dance walked aft again, and presently Skinner, having taken all his dunnage to the mate's room walked forward with Mr. Toms' sea bag upon his shoulder and threw it to him, while the men all laughed at Frere.

FROM that evening, the brigantine sailed southward in a steady breeze, and, warned by the master that he'd have no fighting, every one kept peace.

With only the master and the mate to wait upon and stores to serve to the cook, my work was easy. I had time to myself, and sought the opportunity to talk to Mr. Toms. It came at length upon a windy, star-strewn night when all the sailors sat talking in the forecastle. We conversed in whispers on the top of the cook-house. The gig was lashed beside us, and we tried to think out some method whereby we might escape from the brigantine in her. But, though stoutly built, the gig was small and unfit for heavy weather, so that to hope to get away while the *Bantam* was still in windy latitudes was impossible, and we decided to wait till she was farther south; then, on some dark night, to leave her, if we could by any means contrive it.

Some three weeks after leaving Bristol, Captain Dance ordered almost all sail furled, and the *Bantam*, idling along the sea, tacked to and fro while a man aloft, as well as every one on deck, kept lookout for her consort. On the third afternoon, the sky became sullen and overcast, and the heat stifling. That night when Captain Dance and Skinner were on the poop I went to look for Mr. Toms and found him on the cook-house. He was expecting me, and already had the lashings cast off the gig.

"It may be our only chance," he said, and added, "We may not get far."

A terrific downpour commenced, and all sound of creaking gear was silenced by the rain's incessant patter. The sea hissed in intense darkness.

"We're mad to go like this," whispered Mr. Toms, "but I can't stay."

"She'll fill with rain and sink under you, sir," said I. He replied, "No fear of that."

Then he asked me was I ready to be gone. When I confessed that I dared not go, he grasped my hand and bade me a whispered good-by.

I heard no sound from him and saw only a thin cleavage, where phosphorus brightened the water beside the gig's bow. After peering for some minutes into the darkness, I went aft to my room and, glad of the *Bantam's* planks beneath me, lay in my bunk. While I tried to picture Mr. Toms alone in the inky night, on the rain beaten sea, Skinner passed and repassed above my head. Long after midnight I stole out to the coolness of the deck, and sitting beneath the break of the poop, leaned against the bulkhead and fell asleep.

When I woke it was broad daylight and a sailor stared down at me. He was on his way to the wheel and I rose and went toward my pantry. In the alleyway I came face to face with Captain Dance who glowered at me ferociously.

"Where have you been?" he demanded.

"I slept on deck, sir," said I, "It was too hot in my room."

"Hot!" said he, "wait till you speak of hot. Where's the gig, eh?"

I started at the question and, seizing me by the collar, he growled at me—

"You helped Toms get away!"

"I don't know what you mean, sir," I said.

"You're lying," he replied, "if it wasn't that you know something of medicine, I'd throw you to the sharks." He twisted my arm till I cried out in pain. "The sharks have got Toms long ago," he said, "and good riddance!" Then, flinging me toward the pantry, he ordered me to have breakfast ready at once.

While they ate breakfast, he and Skinner talked of men whom they had seen devoured by sharks. Hoping, no doubt, to make me confess that I had aided Mr. Toms to get away, they took delight in torturing me. But I kept silence and tried to hide my horror from them.

Two days after Mr. Toms' escape a sail was sighted and the brigantine was immediately headed toward her. When the two ships were a few miles apart Captain Dance ordered the hatches opened and a man sent aloft to the fore crosstrees to keep lookout lest any cruiser appear. Then the *Bantam* was laid aback to wait the approach of her consort, a fast-looking, black-painted bark.

Without a moment's delay, the two crews went to trans-shipping the fittings of a slaver to the *Bantam*—water barrels, barrels of meal and of rice, and many sets of chains with manacles attached. There were kegs of rum also, and a number of large crates containing cheap baubles, and trinkets and lengths of gaudy cloth.

The consort's crew were as wild appearing a company as were our own and went about their work as complacently as though it were an everyday occurrence. Captain Dance exchanged barely a word with the bark's captain, but, watching the transshipment of the stores, continually bade Skinner hasten.

When the transfer was accomplished, the two captains talked upon the *Bantam's* poop and the consort's mate ordered her hatches closed. Then a sailor tossed a tarpaulin from the bark's cook-house and to my amazement I saw, when the tarpaulin was thrown down, the gig in which Mr. Toms had made his escape.

Captain Dance saw the gig at the same instant that I did, and, turning to his accomplice, asked—

"Where did you get my gig?"

"Yours? What d'ye mean?" asked the master of the bark, and Captain Dance told him of Mr. Toms' escape.

"So that's it, eh?" said the other, "And him with a fine tale of being adrift ten days! You can have him back, Dance, and bad luck to the two of you."

Dance shook his head.

"Findin's keepin's" said he; but the captain of the bark flatly refused to keep Mr. Toms.

The end of it was that they tossed a coin to see which should have him, and, the toss going against Captain Dance, our one-time mate was fetched from the consort's hold and returned to the *Bantam*.

Then, while the bark stood away toward the African coast on a course more to the southward, the men were set to work to prepare the hold for the arrival of a slave cargo.

That afternoon Captain Dance, striding his poop, swept the eastward horizon with a telescope. Dark brought a fresh wind, and the brigantine raced toward Africa. Greatly excited, peering through my cabin port, I imagined the low stars to be lights on the slave coast.

I dared not try to talk with Mr. Toms, for I knew that Captain Dance would be watching me. Frere also, I knew, would be glad to do anything to make trouble; for, like the master, he also had accused me of aiding Mr. Toms' escape.

It was after midnight when I turned into my bunk and fell asleep. When I awakened Captain Dance stood above me. It was still night. My lamp was lit. The brigantine groaned to the pressure of a strong wind, and the sea roared without my port.

"Get out. Look alive!" said Captain Dance, and as I sprang to the deck ordered me to follow him. He led me to the saloon.

Mr. Toms leaned against the bulkhead. Skinner held one of his wrists in a vice-like grip while Frere held the other.

Dance took a seat opposite them.

"Steward," said Dance, "I'm going to shew you what happens to them as blabs on a slaver," and looking to Frere he said, "Leave him be. The mate can hold him. Can you hold him, Mister Mate?"

Skinner grinned.

"Fetch that medicine chest, you," said the master to Frere, and Frere went to a storeroom in the rear of the saloon, whence he returned dragging a strong wooden chest.

Captain Dance turned to me.

"Open that chest," he ordered. "Let's see what's in it that we need."

I lifted the lid of the chest. It was fitted with trays and partitions in all of which were bottles or jars.

"Do you see aught you know?" asked Captain Dance.

"Yes, sir," said I, for I knew all the drugs the chest contained.

"What's there that's good for burns, steward?" he asked.

"Burns, sir?" said I, surprized.

"Aye, burns," said Dance, and added. "Is them knives sharp?"

I picked up several neglected surgical instruments. Though dark from want of care, they were keen edged.

"They're sharp, sir," I replied.

"Alright," said Dance, and to Skinner, "Now you hold out his hands. We'll fix a blabber so as he can't blab."

Skinner took a yet firmer grip on Mr. Toms' wrists, and Mr. Toms, his eyes on Captain Dance's face, said—

"I don't fear you, you devil!"

Dance laughed, and turning to me said, "The first two fingers on each hand, steward. Slit them tendons, now. Fix him so he won't blab in writin'."

I stared horrified at Captain Dance.

"Get it done now," he growled, "or maybe we'll fix you the same, my man."

Skinner and Frere both grinned at me.

While Mr. Toms watched me from drooping lids, I trembled and went faint.

"Get steward a toss of brandy, you," said Dance to Frere, and Frere poured a glass and held it to my lips.

"Now, steward," said Captain Dance.

MR. TOMS gave me such a strange, appealing look that I at once caught his full meaning. Did I not do it, one of them would.

I pushed the glass aside and lifted a knife. While Skinner and Frere held his hands toward me, with the fingers stretched, I bent above them; and taking his right palm pressed it reassuringly. He stood with his teeth set, his face gone very white.

I pricked his right forefinger in the fleshy part, so that blood spurted from it; then, while he shivered, thrust the knife point deeper; but made a simple flesh wound only, and avoided every tendon. His second finger I treated similarly; then both first fingers of his other hand.

While Frere stood, pale as Mr. Toms himself, Captain Dance studied the sliced fingers that he thought I'd crippled.

"If when they heal, the fool can write," he said, his baneful eyes fixed fast upon my face, "I'll see to you myself."

"He'll never write again, sir," I whispered, terror in my heart; but my eyes, by a soul-wrenching effort, meeting his.

Amused, and little caring as to whether Mr. Toms might bleed to death or not, he watched me while I bound the dripping fingers up. While doing so I managed, for all the captain's watching, to once more press Mr. Toms' palm; and caught the faint flicker of a brave smile about his lips. "We're done with you," said Dance. "Get back where you belong."

As I went to my room the negro cook entered the saloon, bearing a small lighted brazier. Dance came and looked in on me; then went, and left my door locked behind him.

But for the sounds of the great ocean, there was silence.

When I again opened my eyes upon my lighted lamp I knew that I had fainted. Dawn was coming through my port, and the lamp burned feebly. Some one unlocked my door and Skinner's voice bellowed—

"You there, steward, we'd like to see some breakfast. Make it soon!"

I hurried to my pantry. Sounds of excited voices reached me from the deck. I heard the footsteps of Dance and Skinner overhead. Glancing through the pantry port I saw a low, gray haze in the far eastward beneath the pallor of the morning sky, and stared at mists above the shore of Africa. A light wind bore the *Bantam* landward. Flecked with rare white caps, the blue sea sparkled as an opal dawn grew rosy for the sunrise. Setting the saloon table I shuddered at thought of Mr. Toms and wondered when I should see him again, but could not keep my eye from the bright scene beyond the port holes. The air was heavy with strange fragrance. The sun leapt suddenly from fast dissolving mists that floated above a long line of tall green trees. In front of palms and mangroves a stretch of silver sand gleamed to the water's edge, lapped by a fringe of foam.

Dance appeared in the saloon and gave me a sharp glance; then entered a spare cabin and closed the door behind him. When he reappeared a frown darkened his face. He bade me hasten breakfast.

The heat was intense. The morning wind was dying, the brigantine scarcely moving.

While Captain Dance drummed impatiently upon the table, Skinner came in and took his seat. They ate hurriedly, in silence. When they rose, Captain Dance said to me—

"Take that fellow some food," and nodded toward the spare cabin.

As I went to the spare cabin with the loaded tray, the rattle of our gear reached me, and orders given in the stentorian voice of Skinner.

Mr. Toms lay with his hands bandaged as I had left them. His lips were swollen and parted, his eyes full of pain. His tongue, blistered and inflamed, was swollen horribly.

Sick with horror, I carried the tray away and returned in a few minutes with a thin gruel. Unable to take that he motioned my hand away, and tried in vain to utter some word. I flung the gruel through the port hole to the sea and ran for water. While I trickled the water between his lips, he looked at me gratefully, then dozed off.

The brigantine was noisy with the sound of many voices. In a complete sea-silence, upon the edge of an ocean placid as a mirror, there had arisen a discordant jabber in excited tongues.

No one paid any heed to me when, going to the deck, I stared at a swart company of naked savages in whose hands were spears, and clubs dark-stained upon their knotted edges.

Captain Dance was talking with two brown-visaged Europeans, who smiled and nodded while gesticulating with open hands.

The brigantine was less than a quarter mile off shore. Her canvas, lowered but not furled, rustled along her spars while a barely perceptible swell ran under her. Her hatches were wide open. Along her landward side were long canoes from which savages chattered to those upon her deck. Amongst the canoes was a boat in which were seated three Europeans who smoked nonchalantly and unconcerned. While the brigantine's sailors gathered at the rail and called down greetings to these three, Skinner approached Captain Dance as though for orders.

Dance, turning to the two slave traders, said—

"The cash is yours as soon as you deliver."

"What have you got for *them?*" asked one of the traders, nodding to the savages upon the deck.

"The same as usual," said Dance. "I'll have my mate send the baubles ashore, but there'll be no rum delivered till I've got my cargo."

"That's right, that's right, Captain," said one of the traders, and Captain Dance spoke a few words to Skinner.

Two sailors, sent into the hold by Skinner, passed up the crates, and Skinner, taking a spear from the nearest savage, pried them open.

"Help yourselves," said he.

Shouting and jabbering, the savages tossed the contents of the crates to their canoes and in a few moments were on their way ashore.

Captain Dance called Skinner.

"Take the gig, Mister. Take that steward and another man. Go see they send us none but such as we want."

Skinner bade Frere into the gig and in a moment Frere and I were rowing him ashore. Coming close in, we found the hidden entrance of a little creek wherein lay anchored a small sharp-bowed schooner. The slave traders followed us. Behind us the *Bantam* looked like a black-stemmed water lily, with its petals faded by the torrid sun. All about us the jungle rose, close to the water; with a narrow beach between. Upon the beach were gathered the savages who, chattering and laughing, divided the contents of the crates between them, and compared their baubles. The two slave traders, speaking to a naked giant who seemed to be their chief, pointed to a narrow pathway that led into the jungle, and immediately the savages, yelling like a company of demons, rushed toward that path. The traders followed, with Skinner, Frere and myself at their heels.

AFTER some hundred yards of winding pathway we reached a clearing where stood a baracoon. A stench met our nostrils. From within the baracoon rose a low murmur, as of many people moaning. There were distinct sobs, and sobs blended together till it seemed that a river of tears must flow within those tall stakes. While Skinner stood talking with the traders, Frere watched him from baneful eyes and as we approached the baracoon he left us and mingled with the savages. When the gateway was flung open Skinner stepped past the traders and surveyed the interior of the place which was now deathly still. The stench, horrible before, was redoubled.

"We've held them here two weeks waiting for you," said one of the traders.

Black figures lay prone, or knelt, upon the tramped earth. Some leaned against the baracoon walls. Overhead, a carrion bird hovered. Before me, just within the gate, a woman clutched an infant to her breast, her eyes on Skinner's face, Ebon-skinned men and women stared at us. On some, old wounds festered. From behind us savages gibbered, and grinned on their captives.

Skinner pointed to the woman close to the gate.

"She'll do," he said; whereat a trader turned to the savages and spoke a few words in their lingo.

Several entered the baracoon, and, at a nod from one of the traders, one lifted the infant and tossed it over the palisade. The woman shrieked; but, prodded by a savage, tottered without. I reeled, and grasped Skinner's arm. He ignored me, while more prisoners, herded by their captors, followed the woman. They filed by me, their heads drooping, their hands palsied at their sides. Old men were shoved aside; old women, at a shake of Skinner's head, thrust back against the palisade. Those left behind huddled like sheep and stared at us from little groups. In a space left empty in the center of the place, a vulture settled by a still, black body.

I staggered out to the clearing where gabbling savages displayed to one another bright cloths, and beads, and paltry trinkets of tin.

At the edge of the clearing, Frere, half hidden by some palms, spoke by gesture to a large savage who, eyeing him curiously, looked from him to Skinner, and greedily regarded a sheath knife that Frere displayed. Presently the savage grasped the knife and vanished. Then Frere, his pipe between his lips, strolled to the baracoon, which was emptying now of all but the feeble. Vultures, descending in companies, strutted to and fro. Addressing the traders, Skinner said—

"All right, come aboard and get your money." Looking to the savages he added, "Keep them devils back. Let enough go off to paddle the canoes, and no more."

He called to Frere and me—

"All right. Get back aboard now."

The traders walked ahead of us. In front of them, herded by their captors, the slaves' feet raised a thin cloud of dust. Overcome, I stumbled and grasped Skinner by the arm.

"You'll get used to 'em," he said, and shook my hand off; while Frere went on ahead. "Come along, now," he ordered me; but, my vision blurring, I fell to my knees, overpowered by the jungle odors, the reek of the baracoon, and the hot tropic glare.

I opened my eyes again to find myself alone; the slaves and their captors, the traders and my shipmates, all gone from sight about a bend in the pathway. A great savage who clasped a sailor's sheath knife gazed at me for a moment from amidst the trees, then vanished. I staggered to my feet and ran. When I came to the beach, where the captives were being loaded into the canoes, an uncertain breeze blew. The surf had risen and beat on the sand at the creek's entrance. The brigantine looked very far away. Skinner was not in sight. Frere called to me—

"Where's the mate?" and I sat in the gig and hid my face in my hands.

Paddles beat the water all about us. Ahead of the slave canoes went the boat of the traders, rowed by the three European sailors. Close to the gig a canoe spilled over and upset its freight of blacks into the white surf. Their bodies shone amidst the shining foam. While the paddlers hastily righted the canoe and hurried back for others sharp fins darted into the foam, which turned instantly from snow to tinged vermilion.

"Where's the mate?" asked Frere.

"Why don't ye speak? Where's Skinner?" he demanded, and something in his eyes made me sick with a yet greater fear.

"What's keeping the fool back?" he snarled.

The last canoe was gone, and I cowered from him.

"Skinner!—O, Skinner!" he shouted, and there was no reply.

I saw Captain Dance who, bending from the *Bantam's* poop, watched the loading of the slaves. Now and again he raised his head and stared toward us.

Soon, rowed swiftly by the three Europeans, the trader's gig returned from the brigantine. One of the traders shouted—

"The skipper wants ye aboard. Where's your mate?"

Canoes began to return, with kegs of rum between the paddlers, and still we waited for the mate. It was close to noon, the heat intolerable. We moved beneath an overhanging tree and there in the shade, Frere lay back in the stern sheets, unconcerned as though he were in his bunk aboard.

Savages, the surf lapping their feet, watched the return of their fellows. The traders shouted to us warning that it was time to be going, and boarding their schooner made haste to get her anchor up and shake her canvas out. The returning paddlers chanted barbaric songs, and, leaping to the sand, hauled the canoes from the water, and rolled the kegs of rum ashore. They drank from bung holes, and broke kegs open with their clubs. We heard indistinctly the shouts of Captain Dance who gesticulated to us from his poop.

When rum-heated savages approached, Frere started up.

"Shove off! shove off!" he cried.

We shoved the gig into deep water and grasped the oars. Some sprang into canoes to follow. They yelled; but, muddled by the rum, moved in semi-circles and paddled wildly. A tall black ran waist deep into the surf to hurl a spear at us. The trader's schooner slipped by and passed southward. Suddenly, as though moved by a simultaneous impulse, the entire company of savages ran from the fore-shore, and, brandishing spears and clubs, disappeared into the jungle path, while vultures rose and floated above the clearing.

Captain Dance looked down at us.

"Where's Skinner?" he asked.

Frere looked up and shook his head.

"They must ha' got him, sir," said he.

Captain Dance scowled down at Frere, swore a great oath, and bade us hurry aboard.

The brig was silent. Her sailors sheltered in the foresail's shadow from the sun glare. The cook peered curiously into the hold.

Dance roared an order to the men who immediately hoisted the gig.

"You, Frere, get all sail set!" he commanded.

The sails fell, rustling. A murmur rose from the hold. Dance, striding impatiently about his poop, gave jerky orders to the helmsman, and the *Bantam*, gathering headway, stole off-shore; while, far to the southward, the schooner of the slave traders was become a small white dot.

I passed through the saloon to the spare cabin. Mr. Toms, seated upon the edge of the bunk, motioned to me for water, which, when I brought it, he sipped eagerly and with less trouble. He looked a question at me.

"There are a hundred and fifty slaves in the hold, sir," I said. "She is going to sea."

I looked at his seared tongue and saw that the swelling was already much reduced.

"It will heal, and you will speak again, sir," I told him; then went to my pantry and made him a gruel that he contrived to swallow.

As I left him Captain Dance came to the saloon, and opening the spare cabin peered within.

"Get out," he ordered, "the ship's shorthanded," and Mr. Toms walked unsteadily out to the deck.

Blue water rippled at the *Bantam's* bow. She rolled gently. From her wide open hatch came a fetid odor of unwashed black bodies, and looking down in passing I saw woolly heads, and forms that swayed uneasily to the light motion of the brigantine.

Frere put all sail on her. When the gear was all coiled and hung upon its pins, Dance ordered him to keep a man aloft to watch for ships. Then he bade me follow him, and, going forward, called two sailors. He led the way into the hold. The afternoon sun shone down the hatchway, but the wings of the vessel were in deep gloom. Silence fell while Dance stood peering round him. When he bade the sailors clear a way to the stringers, they flung black men backward as men by the docks fling merchandise about.

"Now," said the master, "while they're gettin' sea legs we'll chain the big bucks up."

The sailors grasped a powerful black and dragged him to Dance, who manacled and chained his ankles to a stringer. Another and another were thus secured till none but the smaller and the women were left free. Dance and the sailors paid no heed to the foul air; but I was sick. One of the sailors raised the head of a young woman whom I recognized as that one whose baby had been tossed from the baracoon, and, with a vile word to his partner, grinned to Dance. Without a word Dance smote the man squarely upon the chin, so that he sprawled amongst the feet of the negroes.

"Now, you," said he to me, "look 'em all over. See if there's any sick among 'em," and I began to examine the poor seasick wretches.

VERY soon I found a young man racked with fever, and Dance watching me study him asked—

"Sick, is he?"

"Yes, sir," I said, "he needs the light and air."

Dance grunted contemptuously and bade a sailor go fetch two more men. When they came, he ordered the first two to pass up the ailing slave.

"Over the side," he snapped, and I, while all the sailors looked at me amusedly, cried—

"Captain! Captain!"

"Come on, now! look 'em over, you," he ordered me.

I found a black in whom the fever was yet more advanced. Dance, watching me closely, said—

"Is he sick, too?" and I replied, "Not very sick, sir."

When we had been around the hold he said—

"That's a good start. Last voyage I threw a score over the first day at sea."

He ordered me and the two sailors to the deck. The brigantine glowed in the low rays of a red sun. Foam creamed in her wake, her sails white as the soft trade wind clouds on the horizon. Far astern, the shore of Africa was a dark ribbon.

The master called to Frere—

"Have that Toms go help the cook, now," and while he walked his poop, the cook and Mr. Toms bore pails of steaming meal to the hold; Mr. Toms bearing the pails with difficulty.

After cabin supper was done I returned to the deck to find the *Bantam* racing with her rail deep down. A hard wind blew and stars shone on a sea that leapt with fiery crests. Bright bubbles burst about the brigantine and narrow tracks of light trailed far astern.

"Get them hatches on," said Captain Dance to Frere, "she will be taking water soon."

Then there was no sound but the ocean's.

Next morning Dance bade me fetch a lantern.

"We'll look 'em over again, steward," he said.

I went first into the hold, but at the moment that the captain would have followed a cry rang from aloft—

"Sail-ho!"

Dance ran from the hatch, and, left alone amongst the slaves, I looked about me.

Some lay enfeebled with sea sickness. Some leaned their backs against the stringers. All turned their eyes on me, and when a woman wailed her wailing spread till all the hold was a dark well of misery.

The cook appeared, and with him Mr. Toms. They brought pails of meal, the steamy odors of which commingled with hot odors of the hold. While they fed such as could eat, I observed many that were fevered. Some shivered with cold chills. Foreheads that were hot to my touch showed small, hard pimples. Here and there a man or woman squatted with eyes half closed, the lids swollen and inflamed.

Dance appeared at the hatch.

"Out of that, and get the hatches on," he ordered.

The cook and Mr. Toms preceded me to deck, where the sailors ran from brace to brace with Frere at their heels. Dance, himself hauling on the wet ropes, shouted to Mr. Toms and me to put our weight upon the braces. The masts bent like larch trees. Leaping to meet white combers the *Bantam* flung spray high, and strained, with her deck deep in water.

I saw spray uptossed about the pursuer's bow, and a quick glint of sunlight upon a cannon on her forecastle head. When a shot splashed astern of the brigantine, Dance laughed. Noon came and went while his ship flew on as though her only people were those upon her deck. In the galley the cook had meal boiling, but Dance forbade the hatches opened. The evening came cloudy with a sprinkle of light rain, and at dark Dance called to Frere—

"Square off, mister, we'll fetch the wind astern."

Clouds smothered the stars. With the wind at her heels the *Bantam* plunged to a rain-beaten sea. While she raced all night I slept, and woke to sleep and wake again. At dawn Captain Dance shook me.

"Get out! Get below," he said.

Here and there on the horizon rain squalls drifted. The *Bantam* was alone on a peaceful sea.

While I went below with Mr. Toms and the cook, Captain Dance stood by the open hatch. I choked in the foul air of the hold. The brigantine was rolling easily, and inky bodies swayed to her slow motion. Frere came down. Here and there a black man eagerly grasped and gulped the warm food. Many lay motionless. Many looked at us from diseased and half closed eyes. When a great manacled negro tried to reach Frere with his hands a sailor who had followed Frere below cuffed him to quick submission.

"How do they look, Mister?" asked Dance, and Frere replied, "They're a good lot, sir, barrin' but a few."

Dance bade Frere go to the poop, then, coming to the hold, called to me—

"How do they look, steward?"

"They were two weeks in the baracoon, sir."

He swore at me.

"What do you mean?" he snarled.

"There's smallpox in the hold."

Staring at me, and from me to the slaves, he uttered a great oath.

"What'll we do?" he asked.

"Turn back to Africa," I said.

He buffeted me with his closed fist. While I lay sprawled amongst black feet he shouted to Frere.

When Frere came he said—

"Get the spare cable ranged."

Then he bade me pick out the sick slaves, and after I had pointed out some forty sent me to the deck about my business. The sailors were ranging an iron cable along the ship's side, outside the starboard rigging, and securing it there with light lines. When the cable was all ranged the sick slaves were sent to the deck.

"Make 'em all fast along the chain," ordered Captain Dance, and led by Frere, the sailors tied every one of the trembling blacks to the cable links.

"They keep them in the baracoons too long," said Dance, blinking angry eyes in the sunshine.

That day the hatches were left wide, and Captain Dance kept from the hold.

At dark a sailor who shook with fever chills came to me on his way to take the wheel. He begged me to get him medicine. I said—

"Go tell the captain that you have the smallpox."

As the man approached the poop ladder Captain Dance shouted an order, and, followed by Frere, leapt to the quarterdeck.

Far off a pyramid of sail had risen against the rising moon.

Frere ran the sailors to the forecastle head. With them he bent above the anchor to the shank of which the ranged cable had been made fast. They pried it outboard, edging it along till it lay balanced just above the sea.

"Now heave!" cried Frere. "We'll lighten her."

The anchor slipped clear, and sinking took with it the cable and its human load. There was a rattle of iron links, hoarse quick-smothered screams, then silence. Large rain drops fell, and a squall, catching the brigantine, whipped her forward. The moon was hidden, the far-off cruiser lost.

While Captain Dance was yet upon the forward deck, Mr. Toms ran aft and to the poop. Flinging the shivering helmsman from the wheel he grasped the spokes, and hove the helm hard down, so that the brigantine, coming up into the wind was caught aback and lay erect with the rain hissing upon her.

Roaring an order, Captain Dance ran aft, and seeing me by the saloon skylight growled—

"What's the matter here?"

"The crew has got the fever, sir," said I, "The helmsman's down."

Dance uttered oath on oath. Storming, he peered along his deck, now faintly glimmered by the breaking moon, and standing behind him there I saw what he saw also.

NAKED shapes were creeping from the hatch.

While tumult rose from the dark hold where raged the manacled, some of the slaves, as though scenting the cooked food, made toward the galley. Some tottered to the rail and looked across the sea. Some, with blinded eyes, groped with their hands outstretched.

The wind rustled in sails that glowed like ivory above the blacks beneath.

Turning to me and to Mr. Toms who stood behind me Captain Dance said—

"We'll get the men and drive them slaves below." But Mr. Toms looked disdainfully into his blinking eyes. While they stood face to face the sailors made way through the hungry blacks and came toward us.

Captain Dance said to me—

"Get food. They'll follow us for food," and hurrying to the storeroom I returned with sacks of biscuit.

He ordered me to go below into the hold and take a sack of biscuit with me; then, taking a sack himself, approached the blacks upon the deck.

Followed by Mr. Toms, I carried a sack down into the hold and some of the slaves, seeing the food, came after us. Their hungry cries mingled with the uproar of the manacled who rattled their chains along the stringers.

Saying to Mr. Toms—

"We must have light down here," I turned to go to the deck for a lantern; but when I came to the level of the hatch coaming I saw Captain Dance who, with two or three of the sailors, was beating the blacks upon the deck with belaying pins and capstan bars. He herded them toward and upon me, so that I was forced to leap back below.

Then, numb with a new fear, I heard Captain Dance say—

"They'd like to turn the slaves on us, them two!"

Some one laughed above me, and, Dance bidding the sailors hasten, the hatches were thrown on and battened down upon us.

Mr. Toms took my arm. The darkness was absolute, the air too horrible to breathe. Chains clinked, and chained slaves cried to the free. Mr. Toms drew me forward, along the center of the hold. While I went with him blindly, he went as one who knew the ship through long acquaintance. Presently he stopped and I heard a door slide open. He drew me after him, and closed the door when we were both gone through. Striking a light, he held it above his head, and I saw that we were in the sail locker. Coils of rope and cloths of canvas lay at out feet. A lantern swung to the beam above our heads and laying down the sack of biscuit that he had carried he reached for the lantern. It was a spare port sidelight lantern and its red glass cast a rosy glow about us when he lighted it. He found a hammer and a cold chisel, then led the way back to the door.

"The slaves will kill us, sir," said I; but pointing to the bright red lantern he shook his head.

The sack of biscuit on his shoulder, we reentered the hold where the same sounds greeted us—outcry and groaning and the clink of chains. He held the lantern, and, passing me the tools, approached the nearest manacled slave, a great man into whose ankles the iron chain ate. The black looked horrified at our bright red flame. Its rays quivered upon him, and the unchained drew hastily away. Silence fell, broken only by indrawings of breath and an occasional moan. Mr. Toms motioned me to knock the big black's shackles free.

I went from chained slave to chained slave, and set each free while a circle of bulged eyes watched us eagerly from the outer range of the red lantern light. When all were free Mr. Toms tossed a biscuit toward the nearest black, who grasped it eagerly. Another strove to take the biscuit from the first and to him also Mr. Toms tossed food, so that it was but a moment till all the able slaves were circling us, and elbowing one another. Many lay sick about the hold and paid no heed to us. With me beside him, Mr. Toms backed toward the open door. When at the doorway he tossed out a large handful of biscuit and, disregarding the lantern now because grown used to it, the slaves closed in. Our faces toward the blacks we backed into the sail room. Mr. Toms turned the lantern out and flung it to a corner. Faint rays of moonlight filtered through an open hatch and voices reached us from above. From behind us came the dragging patter of bare feet upon the sails.

In a moment we stood on the fore-deck, in the full light of the moon. The sailors were walking aft with Captain Dance and Frere before them. Motioning me toward the cook-house, Mr. Toms pointed to the gig. He dropped the now almost empty sack and a black who rose from the sail locker behind us sprang toward it. Others followed fast. As we hurried to the top of the cook-house the slaves streamed from below. Some looked dazedly around them. Others, bolder, strode along the deck.

Mr. Toms and I worked feverishly at the gig's lashings. While a cloud crossed the moon black forms were blended to one darkness that surged as a stream surges, freed from an open sluice.

While clouds grew denser we hove upon the gig. Just as we had long ago lowered her for Mr. Toms' escape, so we lowered her now. As we rested her stern upon the deck Frere's voice cried "help," and we heard Captain Dance curse horribly. In another minute we had the boat adrift. We ransacked the cook-house and, finding a store of food and a full water beaker, dropped them into her. Mr. Toms followed me into the boat and, while I shoved off, tossed loose and set her triangle of sail.

From the deck of the *Bantam* there came a buzzing sound, a tramping, and a murmur in many uncouth voices. The moon broke out, and we saw Captain Dance upon his poop with black woolly heads bobbing below him on his quarterdeck. Two sailors who rushed forward vanished into the forecastle and banged the door fast behind them.

Blacks ascended the poop ladder to be met at the top by Captain Dance who hurled them down upon their fellows. They came back bare-handed, their skins ashine, to be met and hurled down again. Enfeebled slaves crept from the sail locker, to fall prostrate in the moonlight. Many, whose eyes were blinded, staggered here and there.

The moon dimmed by a cloud again, we saw only the shadow of the *Bantam*. Her reek, poisoning the sea, grew less. While rain fell in our faces and wind came, we heard the suck and upwash as she heeled down. With our sheet eased off we sped from her.

"How far to land?" I asked of Mr. Toms, forgetting that he could make no answer.

When the sky was clear once more, the *Bantam* was far off. Her square sails aback, she looked a wandering, unguided cloud beneath the steady clouds that swept above her. We saw her for hours, until, no longer distinguishable, she was lost amidst the sea crests.

Mr. Toms motioned me to lie down and sleep, but I could not. He steered toward the eastward. At dawn the wind fell and he slept; while I sat on, searching the sea for a sail.

I awoke suddenly. Canvas towered above me and a curious company gazed down into our boat. Disturbed by the creak of a ship's gear Mr. Toms sat up.

From the deck of the vessel above us a voice cried—

"Hello, Toms!"

The corvette that had sailed from Bristol on the tide ahead of the *Bantam* cruised forth and back upon the slave patrol. Her lieutenant, to whom I had told our story, talked often to Mr. Toms, who, shaking his head, made only inarticulate sounds that bore no meaning. Days passed on until a month was gone, and all were grown used to his silence.

Toward sunset of a cool trade-wind evening Mr. Toms came to my room. His lips moved, and, his fingers twitching, he pointed to the deck. I jumped up and followed him.

A sail lay far ahead, and the corvette was stealing toward her. She was a brigantine with her fore yards aback, and word went round that she had been abandoned.

His hand upon my arm Mr. Toms mumbled something, which, as I half caught it, made me start.

"The *Bantam*, sir?" I cried.

We stood and watched the distant sail approach.

"What do you make of her, Toms?" asked the lieutenant, and as he spoke passed Mr. Toms his telescope. Mr. Toms looked through the glass a moment, then handed it to me. The brigantine lay between us and the sun, her hull jet black against an orange cloud. Her idle sails flapped. Her wheel spokes kicked, with no hand upon them.

About her deck and on her forecastle there were bodies stretched. Some lay apart, and some on one another. All were motionless.

When the corvette still lay a quarter of a mile to windward of the brigantine, men held their nostrils. Silhouetted against the glow of the westward, each spar and stay and ratline, and each prostrate body on her deck was sharp.

While all eyes searched her for a sign of life a cry went up from the corvette.

Climbing the brigantine's poop ladder, a bearded figure rose against the sun's red disk. While the sun dipped deeper in the sea it stood erect upon the ladder head; then, as the sun sank, groped on the poop deck stumblingly.

The corvette crept nearer, until, upon a poisoned sea, men hid their faces.

The lieutenant spoke.

"She is a pest ship. We dare go no closer."

Mr. Toms climbed to the corvette's railing, and, all eyes turned to him, stood with his hands cupped to his lips.

A voice, wavering and uncertain, the voice of one who dared not speak, yet must, echoed across the sea.

"Where are you bound for, Captain Dance?"

The stumbling figure on the slaver's poop turned. The wind blew its wavy beard. Its eyes were closed. It stood an instant, half expectantly; then, sinking to its knees, raised outstretched arms toward the tortured voice.

Dark fell upon the tropic sea. The stars came out.

Astern the *Bantam* shone, a snow-white pyramid, and, fading slowly, soon was lost to view.

GAS CASUALTIES

by L. H. N.

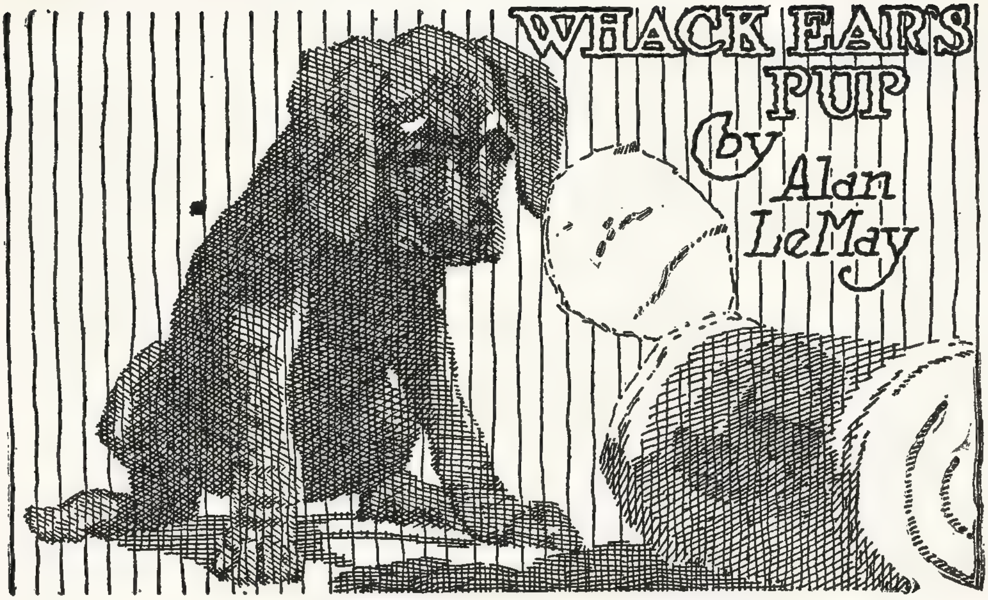
GAS CASUALTIES caused more discussion than any other type. If a man was struck by a bullet or a shell, he had indisputable evidence that he had earned a trip to the hospital, but when a man was gassed, unless he had been burned by mustard, it was a different matter.

When we first went up on the lines it was exceedingly difficult to be sent out as a gas casualty. The particular type of gas known as phosgene seemed to have a delayed action, and men who had been gassed, would not feel the effects of the gas for five or six, and in some cases, twenty-four hours afterward, when they would suddenly collapse. After a few men had been turned back from the dressing stations with bitter curses, and had subsequently collapsed and died from the deadly action of phosgene, the pendulum swung the other way and men were hurriedly evacuated on the slightest suspicion that they had inhaled any gas.

This had to be stopped, because everybody in the zone of fire was breathing more or less gas all the time and at the rate men were going out, very soon there would be no one left to hold the advance-positions.

The authorities tried to remedy this situation by issuing an order that a man who applied for treatment stating that he had been gassed, should be subjected to a searching examination, and that the appearance of his skin, eyes, etc., should be noted carefully. This method did not work very well, because after a man had been in action about forty-eight hours without rest or food, he looked like a living corpse and it was impossible to tell whether he had been gassed or was simply trying to get a free ride out.

There were probably as many men who were gassed and who either did not know it or did not report it, as there were men who were treated for it in the hospitals.



WHACK EAR'S PUP

by Alan LeMay

Author of "Top Horse from Hogjaw," "Terlegaphy and the Bronc," etc.

THE leather-hearted roan, carrying "Whack-Ear" Banks home at a smooth trot, suddenly stretched down a long nose, snorted, and skittered sidewise five yards.

"What the ——!" the big cowpuncher protested. Then, as he cast a swift glance at the cause of the roan's astonishment, "Aw, fer the love o' Pete!"

Swiftly reining in before the gelding could regain his stride, he swung his lean two hundred pounds to the ground, and walked back with the reins looped over his arm.

The terrifying object was a little, huddled litter of three-day pups.

A chill wind, bearing a foretaste of coming snows, swept down from the mountains, whispering in the sage, and rustling the dry stems of the prairie wool. The early dusk of November was pressing down from a sky of frosty lead, giving the vast valley an unfamiliar aspect, unspeakably barren and forbidding. Whack-Ear chafed his cold knuckles against broad palms, and let fall a few scathing adjectives, descriptive of nesters who left little, blind puppies in the middle of a hundred-mile prairie to die.

One of the four puppies whimpered, and shivered miserably with the cold. The cowboy cursed with a vivid bitterness, and ended its troubles forever with a merciful blow with the heel of his boot. The rest were already dead.

He now sighted a fifth puppy, a dozen yards away. As he bent over this last of the litter, he saw that the little, shivering survivor was the smallest, the scrawniest, and apparently the feeblest of the lot. His eye estimated the distance that the puppy had crawled; and a shade of admiration crossed the cowboy's big face, that this wretched little runt should still be the only one of them all to struggle against his fate. As he watched, he saw the puppy's strengthless, almost rudimentary legs make yet another effort to propel the pot-bellied little body forward. Whack-Ear tilted back his Stetson, and ran fingers through his shaggy, mouse-colored hair.

"Game little ——," Whack-Ear said, squinting keen gray eyes at the tiny pup. "Pore little son of a gun, that don't know when he's through! —— if I don't give yuh a hand, pardner!"

The puncher stooped, and gathered up the pitiful scrap of life in one huge hand. The dog baby lay in the big, calloused palm looking scarcely larger than a tadpole, so small it seemed, and so weak. For a moment Whack-Ear stood looking at it, while a few hundred yards away a great bull, marshalling a small herd that hulked black against the gray of the plain, bellowed in a moaning, deep-chested voice that boomed through the dusk.

THE puppy whimpered, a thin, scarcely audible squeak. Whack-Ear opened his shirt, and thrust the puppy inside, against his skin; then, mounting carefully, he rode on, the roan lengthening his strides toward home.

"Now listen," protested "Whiskers" Beck, he of the bushy white beard, holding Whack-Ear's pathetic pup in one hand and gesturing with the other.

He was a bow-legged ancient, bald as an egg, with smiling blue eyes beneath tangled brows, as white as if dusted with Joe's flour.

"You're cook, Joe, an' everythin' centers round you. Less'n you helps us out, the whole p'oject falls through."

"Leave her fall," said "Tarr'ble Joe," so called in mockery of his inflammable disposition. He thrust out an imposing stomach aggressively, threw back his leonine head, and stared down at Whiskers past a small but bulbous nose. "Do I care?"

"The Triangle R," Whiskers went on, "has been completely dogless fer two years now, or ever since ol' Strap accidently bit that hot-headed feller in the neck. 'Tain't right, not on a up to date ranch like this is. If we raise this'n up right, he'll be more help than a top hoss on roller skates. Roundin' up cattle, carryin' messages, draggin' in boys that gets hurt—"

"Horse collar," said Tarr'ble Joe. "When it's growed it'll have about a million pups of its own, eatin' us out o' home an' saddle, until the whole works is give over to dogs, complete. *I* know!"

"It ain't that kind of a dog," Whiskers objected. "Jest look at the pore little feller—"

"I won't," declared Tarr'ble Joe flatly, turning a bulging back. "I know my rights!"

He began rattling among his pans.

"Well, I see we got to go ahead as best we can without Joe," said Whiskers, turning to the four other cowboys. "I guess the first thing is feed him!"

"What do they eat?" Whack-Ear wondered. "Mush?"

"Somethin' strengthenin' is what's needed here," Whiskers opined. "I never raised no dogs, but I c'n see where this'n's liable to lose out. We'll take an' chop up some o' that hash, real fine, an' put a little brandy on. When he's wrapped around that, he oughta—"

"Ain't that comin' it a little strong?" asked "Squirty" Wallace, a small man, wiry and bow-legged, with a reputation as a top hand. "I'd say he ain't had much practise eatin', so far. His stumick's liable to be plumb astounded. I say start easy, an' leave his belly figger out what it's up against, gradual."

"——," said "Dixie" Kane, the slender young bronc peeler, his blue eyes enthusiastic, "meat is what dogs like. A child would know that. Whatcha wanta do—make a sissy out o' the dog?"

"Yuh make me sick," snapped Tarr'ble Joe. "Cow's milk, with hot water in, is what he gets. I got it fixed already. Gimme that cur! I'm the nuterition expert around here!"

Tarr'ble Joe held the pup on its back with one hand, while he tried to pour the weakened milk down its throat with a spoon. The puppy sputtered and gagged, and for a moment the punchers were at a loss. This time it was "Doughfoot" Wilson who came forward with a suggestion. His slow mind had been pondering the subject for more than half an hour, and had reached the correct conclusion at last.

"Put the milk in a bottle," he said, "an' leave him suck it out through a rag."

"Sure, that's right," Dixie agreed. "A child would—"

"Shut up," said Whiskers. "Mebbe a child would, but what of it? Barrin' yerself, we ain't children. Now chaw that, and leave us work!"

For a time, Whack-Ear's pup was a popular dog. "Old Man" Rutherford, the tall, rocky-jawed chief owner and boss of the Triangle R, had never encouraged dogs. For two years the Triangle R had been untroubled by examples of the breed—unless you called the "yalla varmints" prairie "dogs," or considered that the little, bold, wily coyotes belonged in the general canine class.

Coming into this perfectly dogless environment, many days before he first opened his eyes, the puppy drew a good deal of attention. Until the novelty wore off, the leather-faced cowpunchers used to cut the cards for the privilege of operating the puppy's nursing bottle, at whatever odd hours their work permitted. They named him Splinter, supposing him to have been abandoned by a nester named Jess Wood. And, as Tarr'ble Joe remarked—

"I guess we're stuck with him, all right!"

For a long time Splinter didn't do very well. He was a weak puppy, his system overtaxed by the exposure that had almost cost his life. During the winter months he did little but sleep by the bunkhouse stove—and grow. But how he grew! In the first month he outgrew the old hat that Whack-Ear had given him to sleep in. His skin was loose enough for two dogs of his size, and his feet promised that he would be a big dog, if ever the rest of him got caught up.

Winter passed without other mishaps than those common to small dogs. He stuck his head into a tin can, and could not get it out, until rescued with an ax. Whiskers claimed that his head stuck because he grew an inch while investigating the can. When tied in a given place he always wound himself up so thoroughly that the only movement possible to him was the rolling of his eyes. Once he was missing for four hours, and was found in a water trough, utterly exhausted from swimming to keep his head up. But these were minor things.

By spring Splinter was half grown, gaunt and lanky after the manner of a hound. With the breaking of the cold weather he began to take an interest in life—and it was then that trouble began in earnest. Such a trail of complications began to be left in his wake that the dingy yellow pup threatened to change the course of Whack-Ear's life.

The first sign of trouble broke when Dixie began to be plagued with fleas. An investigation proved that Splinter had been spending his days in Dixie's bunk. Half-a-dozen times, at least, Dixie lashed Splinter out of the bunk with his belt, the bronc peeler's oaths mingling with paroxysms of glee from the other punchers. That Dixie should get fleas was a very merry thing—until Splinter gave up that particular bunk, and tried all the others in turn. The flea epidemic became universal. Splinter was banished from the bunkhouse by common consent.

The banishment of a dog from the place where he is accustomed to sleep is not a thing to be accomplished without sounds of weeping by night. On the first night of Splinter's expulsion, long, sobbing howls went up outside the bunkhouse door. These tearful expressions of grief were interlarded with periods of frantic barking; it seemed fairly obvious that Splinter was afraid of loneliness and the dark.

When it was apparent that Splinter was good for all night, and that sleep was to be a mere figment of imagination, little Squirty Wallace rolled out of his bunk and plunged cursing into the dark. There followed a series of sharp ki-yi's, mingled with the crack of a snapping rope end, and hoarse shouts of wrath. The sounds of pursuit diminished into the distance. Presently Squirty reappeared, breathing hard, and limping painfully from too frequent contact with sand burrs.

Comparative peace favored the bunkhouse; but not for long. A low wailing sound beyond the door told the punchers that the serenade was about to recommence. Five cowboys and the cook left their bunks with reluctance and bitter words.

"I'll shoot that —— into little thin ribbons!" bellowed Tarr'ble Joe, brandishing his forty-five.

All rushed for the door, bumped into each other in a jam at the narrow exit, and then funneled themselves out into the chilly starlight. Here the party lost its effectiveness. The dog was gone.

"Where the —— is he?" Dixie fumed. "Show me that ——!"

But Splinter, having correctly understood the confused sounds within, had slunk away to hide.

Several hours passed without further trouble. The cowboys had begun to drop off to sleep when that low, dolorous moan, portentous of bigger and louder things, again sounded without. Six tough men and true raised up on their elbows with one accord. Oaths rumbled in the dark. Whack-Ear heaved his huge body upright and lurched toward the door.

"Sit tight fellers. I'll fix this!"

They heard gentle coaxings outside; and in a moment or two Whack-Ear was again silhouetted in the doorway against the starlight, this time with the wriggling pup under his arm.

"Good! Yuh got him!" burst out Tarr'ble Joe. "Now we'll wring his —— neck!" He jerked to his feet and clutched at the dog with beefy hands.

One thrust of a big shoulder sent the cook sprawling back into his bunk.

"Leave well enough be!" growled Whack-Ear's voice in the dark. "He ain't goin' to howl no more. Some others is, though, if hands ain't kept off my dog!"

Sundry bitter growls replied to this announcement, but no immediate action threatened. Whack-Ear took Splinter into his own bunk, where the little dog wiggled and whimpered softly with delight. And, for the time, that settled that.

By this time all hope had been abandoned that Splinter would be of any help in the cow business. Perhaps he was a natural coward at heart; or possibly the bellowing of that great bull, the day Splinter lay a blind and shuddering scrap of helplessness on the plain, had carved into his puppy nature an immutable tale of dread. In any case, Splinter feared cows with a great, overpowering fear. The mere scent of cattle was enough to depress him, and clamp his tail between trembling legs. And the actual sight of a cow, close at hand, always sent him scurrying for cover.

This inherent defect did nothing to increase his popularity with men whose lives were spent working with cattle. Open contempt was added to the increasing malignance with which the men regarded Whack-Ear's pup.

Whack-Ear, too, was disappointed in the dog whose life he had saved. And yet, curiously, he found the pup to be increasingly dear to him. To Whack-Ear he was still the helpless, whimpering thing that he had once held in the palm of his hand, the game little runt that had struggled not to die. The hostility of the other punchers had the effect of driving the pup deeper into Whack-Ear's affections.

By the time that the cowboys began riding in for the spring works it was apparent that Splinter was never going to be a very large dog. He was of an indeterminate yellow color, short and harsh of coat. He continued to be lean and ribby, his ears flopped, and he had the mournful, drooping expression of the hound; but these were his only claims to houndship. His tail was extra long, his feet extra large; but his lower jaw was short and narrow, and he was unquestionably a very small dog.

But, though a poor thing, he was Whack-Ear's own. In time of stress, the shaggy-headed straw-boss found himself defending the little animal with an impassioned grimness.

DAY by day, as the snows melted from the plains, and long strips of green began to show in the brown prairie grass, the cowboys came riding back to their work. Charley Decatur, Old Ben Egan, "Geewhilikers" Rue, Henry N. Schwitzel, known as "Hankenswizzle" by friends; Joe Harker, Tom Six, "Talky" Peters, and "Blazey" Crane of the kinky red hair; "Jawn" Stewart, of the sorrowful eye; "Smoky" Patterson, claimed to be the slowest man in the world; Hal Walters, Sam Watson, big "Java" Lewis, "Bad News" Grogan, "Baltimore" Bob, whose last name was unknown; Terry Bryan, Walt Sanders, "Highpockets" Dyrenforth, and many others came trickling in to round up the remudas, top off their strings, and peel the annual cayuse crop.

As the population of the Triangle R increased, Splinter's opportunities to get into trouble seemed to multiply. One by one, as if with unerring instinct, he was pruning away the last of his friends.

Matters came to a head the day that Splinter welcomed the return of big Tom Six. Whack-Ear had been away on a five-day ride, and was just riding in, jaded and hungry, when the unfortunate event took place. Tom Six, a man with a long, hard face, had unsaddled only a few minutes before; and, having been clapped on the back by such punchers as knew him well enough, had started for the mess shack for a hand-out.

Just then Splinter, who had never seen Tom before, discovered the new hand; and, for some reason, was seized with instant delight. He leaped joyously upon Tom, ran up Tom's new chaps and clean shirt with muddy feet, and splashed the man's face with a long, wet tongue.

Splinter next touched the ground a good ten yards away, lifted thereto by a smashing kick with Tom's sharp-toed boot. Breathless and stunned, Splinter lay kicking feebly, to the accompaniment of strangling noises. Tom stopped swearing and laughed. Whack-Ear dropped from his horse.

In the next moment Tom Six went down under a hurricane of sledge-hammer blows. He was up instantly, and the two big men charged each other with the violence of just wrath. A dozen punchers formed a rooting circle around the battling men, and Old Man Rutherford, anxious to get on with the work, watched with the silence of the resigned. Back and forth and around the circle they fought, with thudding wallops and vicious, smacking jabs. In the end, Whack-Ear won.

When Tom Six had been revived he rode on to other fields.

That evening a delegation waited upon the big straw-boss. This committee was self-inspired and self-elected, but it had back of it the support of almost unanimous opinion.

"Whack-Ear," said Whiskers, running a purple handkerchief over his shiny head, "me an' some o' the boys want to kind o' reason with yuh about this here dog."

"Which one has the leadin' complaint?" Whack-Ear wanted to know.

"All of 'em," said Whiskers, "an' there's more in the bunkhouse; but the rest o' the boys are newer hands, an' didn't feel they oughta push themselves forward."

"What seems to be the trouble?" Whack-Ear asked.

"Here's just a sample," said Whiskers, holding up a draggled mess that he carried in one hand. "Recernize that?"

"No," said Whack-Ear.

"I ain't surprized, how could yuh? That's what's left o' the purtiest bridle this country ever seen. Light an' strong, with silver all over. I found it in the corner o' the main corral this mornin'—chawed, swallered, spit up, an' then tromped on by hosses." Whiskers combed his beard. "Now, I always said give the pup a chance. I wove him that collar, out o' seelected hoss hair, in three colors. But I say he's carryin' this to a ridic'lous extreme."

"I'll pay for—" Whack-Ear began.

"I'm shy one-half pair o' boots," said Squirty Wallace, rumpling his russet hair. "An' you know an' I know that the guilty party could be spit on plenty easy from here."

He scowled at Splinter, who lolled awkwardly on his haunches at Whack-Ear's heels.

"An' speakin' o' chawed stuff," put in Dixie Kane, "you remember that flame-color contest shirt I had, the one I wore to ride at Pendleton? Best there, wasn't it? It's a thing o' the past now, all right. Just a memory, that's all. There ain't enough left o' that purty shirt to make a mane-ribbon for a flea. Look at the little ——! He's laughin'!"

Whack-Ear looked at Splinter, and found that Dixie's last accusation seemed to be true.

"The next thing is somethin' else," said Whiskers. "I guess you know that before you rode out we was troubled with a terrible stink in the bunkhouse. Well, it took us a whole day to tear up the floor."

"Some varmint prob'ly crawled under an' died," Whack-Ear said.

"First time I ever hear of a slab o' beef crawlin' under a bunkhouse by itself," declared Whiskers. "Nossir! The varmint that crawled under the floor crawled out again, leavin' that beef behind. An' there he sits!"

He pointed dramatically to Splinter, who rose up to sniff the pointing finger with interest. Whiskers snatched the finger back.

"That hunk o' beef," said Tarr'ble Joe weightily, "ain't the only one I've missed. Not by no means. That dog has a coyote brain!"

"As long as he stole only what Joe cooked up, we might not have kicked," Whiskers went on. "I spose yuh know Madge is back from the east."

He referred to the handsome and hard-riding daughter of the Old Man, a girl of nineteen, beloved of them all.

"Well sir, Madge cooked up some special pies for us boys—bless her heart—an' set 'em on the porch to cool. That —— dog took one bite out o' each an' every pie!"

"I leave it to to you if that ain't ——," said Squirty Wallace.

"It's sacerlige, that's what it is!" said Whiskers, getting steamed up. "An' it can't go on! Now we come to some o' the main complaints, them so far bein' jest small affairs. I—"

"Listen," begged Whack-Ear. "I'll pay for everythin' Splinter's done, cash money, notes, or stock. An' I—"

"We ain't askin' that," Whiskers stated. "We want to be reasonable an' fair. You ain't got enough dough to square accounts anyway—my bridle was six months' pay alone. But we're willin' to call all bets off, an' leave bygones bury the ax. All we ask is that this thing stop!"

"What do yuh mean?" Whack-Ear demanded.

"Some say shoot an' some say lynch," Whiskers replied. "But I'm moderate. I say send the dog to some far-off place. An' I think I can square it with most o' the boys on that plan, though I may have trouble with some."

"You mean Splinter's gotta be throwed out just because a lot o' old maids in overalls says that—"

"Brother, you named the correct ticket. That dog goes!"

Whack-Ear's gray eyes narrowed.

"You're off," said he. "The man that lays a hand on that dog o' mine will get his neck wrung with my bare hands! An' the man that hurts the pore little feller behind my back, I'll say in advance that he's a yaller, dirty coward, an' a ——, an' scared to stand afore me. Any man that thinks o' sneakin' strychnine into Splinter while I'm gone will have to swaller that, all by hisself, first. An' I'd a —— sight rather be that yaller dog than the man that has to know he's swallowed that!"

Whack-Ear turned and left them, stalking off by himself into the dusk.

COMING in the next day, tired and starved from a hard day's ride, Whack-Ear noticed the silence that greeted him with a deep sense of discouragement. This time Splinter didn't come bounding to Whack-Ear with his usual joyous welcome. He came crawling, sorrowful and penitent, and limping slightly from a hectic day of booting and dodging. But if Splinter could have wept with joy, it was plain that the tears would have been running down his yellow hide at that time.

The pup whimpered and trembled with emotion as he climbed into Whack-Ear's lap, huddled close, and tried to lick the big cowboy's face. Splinter knew well enough that the world clamored for his blood; and he was ashamed, though uncomprehending of his sins.

"Here you are at last, thank ——," he seemed to say. "I know I can count on you—the only friend I've got!"

The big cowpuncher was moved.

"Whack-Ear stand by yuh," he growled, "if I hafta lick every —— of a saddle-pounder on the range!"

Thereafter, for some hours, Splinter was never farther than six inches from Whack-Ear's heels.

The man's promise to the dog was brought to a test no later than the following day.

Geewhilikers Rue, one of Madge's more fervent admirers, made the girl a present of a baby jackrabbit.

"Scuse me, mister," said Whiskers, "but how come a only moderate fast cowboy, such as you be, to catch up with a narrergage mule?"

"I got off my horse an' outrun him," Geewhilikers declared.

Whiskers combed his beard.

"Think of a knee-action like that," he pondered. "I guess you're hard hit, all right!"

Madge received the infant jackrabbit with squeals of delight that made the bashful Geewhilikers flush with joy. She named the new pet "Violet."

Poor Violet, sample of a long-leaping but unfortunate race! While all hands were cheering Dixie Kane's efforts to stay on the hurricane deck of a squealing bunch of steel and high explosive in a cayuse hide, Violet met his fate. Splinter ate him.

When this casual murder had been discovered, Madge Rutherford wept. In five minutes the news had reached the bunkhouse. Twenty ropes were immediately pledged to the cause of lynching Violet's destroyer. Bullets spurted dust at Splinter's flying heels. Whack-Ear's pup, with a raging gang of cowboys not far behind, leaped through three accurately dropped nooses in his mad dash for Whack-Ear's arms. His owner placed the dog on the ground behind him, where he cowered miserably and peered out from between Whack-Ear's legs. The big puncher confronted the lynching party solidly, with grim death in his eye.

"Gimme that —— dog!" foamed Geewhilikers Rue, stalking out ahead of the rest.

"Come an' get him!"

Geewhilikers came.

Rue could fight like a wildcat gone mad. Furious fists smashed into Whack-Ear's face. He was driven back against the log wall of the bunkhouse, and his shaggy head banged against a timber.

The big cowboy sank to his knees, dazed and blinded.

"Get up! Get up an' get cleaned!" raved the voice of Geewhilikers Rue.

With a great effort Wack-Ear regained his feet. As he reeled forward into another smother of blows, he realized that not one voice had urged him on, not one shout had encouraged or acclaimed him as he struggled to his feet. The ring of watching punchers were silent. They wanted him to lose! A hard thing, that, for a man accustomed to have a loyal outfit solid at his back.

Whack-Ear fought better, knowing that he was alone. Presently his head cleared, and he began to beat his opponent back with the sheer weight of his heavy, pounding blows. It seemed to Whack-Ear that they fought a long time. He was gasping for breath, his blows weakening, long before he could notice the least abatement of Rue's strength. But at last Geewhilikers went down.

Four times Geewhilikers Rue struggled to his feet and came back for more, and four times more Whack-Ear battered him to the ground; until at last Geewhilikers tried to rise and could not. The cowboys lifted him to his feet, and with his arms over their shoulders carried him away to bathe his bleeding face. As Rue was led away Whack-Ear heard him demanding thickly—

"Leave me go! I can beat him! I can lick him yet!"

Whack-Ear swayed on his feet, his mouth a red smear.

"Who's next?" he rasped out. "Step out! Who wants some o' the same?"

No one did. Silently they turned away and left him there, with his bruises and his dog. He slumped down on the bench beside the bunkhouse door. For the first time in many a year the big, amiable puncher found himself deserted, and friendless—alone. Silently Splinter climbed into his lap and licked his face.

AFTER the noon dinner, of which Whack-Ear did not partake, Old Man Rutherford called him to his log cottage. Whack-Ear sat nervously, for once, on the edge of a chair in the scrupulously neat room that was parlor, dining-room, and office.

"Whack-Ear," demanded the Old Man, thumbing his granite jaw, "how come yuh can't get along with the boys no more?"

"I dunno," Whack-Ear mumbled.

"They do their work, don't they? They keep their mouth shut, don't they—no fightin' talk nor nothin'?"

"Yep."

"They're good hands, ain't they? Mostly boys we've had every year?"

"Yep."

"You think my straw-boss oughta be brawlin' with the hands, an' beatin' up good boys that does their work, quiet? You think that's the way to get somethin' done?"

Whack-Ear was silent.

"It's that miser'ble dog!" the Old Man roared.

The cowboy did not reply.

"Who set the mess shack afire last week?" Rutherford suddenly demanded.

"Well—Tarr'ble Joe claimed Splinter knocked over a lamp, someway—"

"While stealin' meat," the Old Man concluded. "Look you here, Whack-Ear—I don't hold with dogs. A reasonable dog might be all right. But not this here. That dog has to go!"

Whack-Ear's jaw clamped.

"It's a pore man as won't stand by his own dog," he stated. "When Splinter goes, I go too!"

Old Man Rutherford changed tactics.

"Whack-Ear, you got a future with the Triangle R. You own stock now, an' I aim yuh should own more. Everythin' looks like to work out good for yuh, if only yuh don't get some obstinate notion. I'd even thought that in a few years yuh might—" He hesitated.

Whack-Ear, as if he knew what was in the boss' mind, turned red.

"I was kind o' surprized," the Old Man put in, "that when a pet belongin' to Madge was tore up, every waddie in the works was mad about it but you. An' you, of 'em all, stood up an' scrapped fer the idee that a little thing like makin' Madge cry didn't 'mount to nothin'. I always thought you was real fond o' Madge, Whack-Ear—an' she not thinkin' you was exactly poison, neither."

Whack-Ear squirmed miserably.

"But—but," he stammered, "the pore little feller, he didn't know no better, honest. He wants to do what's right. How can jest a little pup know what he's doin'?"

"Let's be reasonable on this, Whack-Ear," the Old Man urged gently. "Splinter's a real purty thing, an' all, but he's jest a little mite expensive for my ranch. Spose you'd jest ride over to the Sawbuck outfit, an' make one o' the boys a present o' that dog? They got lots o' dogs there, an' one more won't hurt. An' he won't get in trouble much, because they're used to dog ways, an' anyway, they got so many they won't know which dog done it. You see how things is goin'. Ain't mine a purty fair plan?"

"Yep," Whack-Ear conceded at last. "I reckon."

AS IRON TAIL, the young sorrel, thrust a careless foot into a gopher hole and went down, a regret flashed through Whack-Ear's mind that he had elected to ride the most ignorant horse in his string. He had been riding across the prairie at an easy lope, headed for the Sawbuck home ranch, with Splinter clinging fearfully to a position back of the saddle. Suddenly the sorrel somersaulted, and dog and man went headlong into a patch of brush.

Knowing what the half-trained horse would do, Whack-Ear scrambled to his feet and made a mad dash for the sorrel's reins. He was too late. Iron Tail was up before him, and on his way. Whack-Ear wasted no time, either in pursuit of Iron Tail or in gazing after the horse. He sent one meaningful oath after the receding sorrel, and started back to the Triangle R afoot.

The cowpuncher's chagrin at being set afoot did not convey itself to the little dog. Splinter was only too glad to get his feet on the ground again. He capered, he cavorted, he barked. He made mad dashes at the solemn-faced little "picket-pins," only to have them disappear into their holes at the last moment, with derisive barks. Yet it was Splinter who first discerned the danger into which Whack-Ear walked.

Whack-Ear had been plodding along with his eyes on the ground; but he lifted them quickly as Splinter whimpered and cringed against his legs. Just ahead, three steers, long-legged "critters," lank from scanty winter feed, stood at gaze. The cowboy slowed his pace and took thought.

Your range steer will not attack a man on a horse. He knows he will only be made a fool of if he does. But he has little fear of a man on foot; and he is likely to bear a deep-seated grudge. Out on the plain the company of steers is not always a very wholesome thing for a horseless man.

Add a dog to the combination. Steers hate dogs. The sight and the scent of them stir the bovine heart to wrath. Doubtless the cow mind confuses dogs with coyotes and wolves, with whom they have a permanent war. At any rate, cattle can think of nothing else while there is a dog in sight.

Certain trouble was ahead. The group of steers was directly in Whack-Ear's path. He considered circling around them, but realized that with Splinter as a magnet the attempt would be futile. He reached for his holster, to see that his forty-five was loose and ready for work. As his hand touched leather a great shock ran up his arm to his brain. The gun was not there.

He knew well enough where it was. It was in the patch of brush in which he and Splinter had landed when Iron Tail fell. He cast a swift glance back over his shoulder, cursing himself for his carelessness. The patch of brush was now a quarter of a mile away.

Whack-Ear now had his choice of two ways. He could rush the steers, hoping that they would flee; or he could back off, trying to reach his gun before the steers should approach and make up their minds to rush. He chose the former.

"*Yip-yip-yip-ya-Whoopee!*" he yelled. "*Eeeyahoo!*"

Waving his hat, he bounded toward the cattle. The three steers gave a little ground, then lowered their heads and stood waiting. Still yelling, Whack-Ear diminished his strides and stopped, perhaps fifty yards from the three steers. Then he fell silent. Thus confronting each other, the two parties stood, the three steers and the man with the dog. For a full minute the five stood in motionless silence, waiting for the next move.

One of the steers pawed the ground, showering his back with clods of the moist turf. He began the rhythmic, deep-chested groaning that precedes the bellow, and Splinter, trembling violently, whimpered until he almost sobbed aloud. The deep, moaning voice broke into the bleating soprano blare of the challenge. The situation wasn't improving much.

"Splinter, go home!" Whack-Ear ordered.

He knew that the steers would never catch a running, dodging dog, and that in Splinter's departure lay safety for them both.

"Go on! Go home! Git!"

Bewildered by this apparent abandonment, Splinter shrank the closer to the ground, huddling as near Whack-Ear's legs as he could. The puncher saw that there was no hope there. The pawing steer, a great white-face, moved two steps forward, and paused.

Whack-Ear began to move away. Slowly, trying to conceal the fact that he was moving at all, he walked backward, stepping clumsily in his high heeled boots. The steers followed suspiciously, a step at a time. Slowly Whack-Ear gained a little ground; a little more; a little more—

Suddenly the steers surged forward. Whack-Ear yelled, and once more they slowed to a stop. He realized what had happened. Splinter, though keeping close to his master, had momentarily turned tail. The eyes of the steers were on the dog, more than on the man. The pup was spoiling the bold front that was their only hope. The man swiftly stooped and caught Splinter up under his arm; he could feel the little dog trembling against his side as he again backed off. The "critters" had closed ten yards.

Whack-Ear was saving his voice, now. It was his only weapon, and he must use it seldom, lest it have no effect when it was needed most. The three great, expressionless heads stared with a peculiar blank fixety, as if with eyes of glass. When they stood motionless at gaze, the puncher moved backward. When they walked forward the man stopped, waved his hat, yelled, leaped into the air—anything to puzzle the dim cattle minds, and halt that deadly, implacable advance.

He glanced over his shoulder at the distant patch of brush where he knew his weapon lay. So little distance had he covered that his objective seemed no closer at all. And when his eyes struck back to the cattle again they were just a little nearer than before. It was at this point that fear came into Whack-Ear's mind. His imagination pictured the final irresistible charge, the flashing hook of horns, the stabbing grind of trampling hooves.

A swift panic swept through him, and a savage desire to turn and run. He took time to steady himself, for he knew such a move would swiftly accomplish the end.

He backed away again, and again the cattle followed. They had closed another ten yards now. Hardly thirty paces separated the cattle from the retreating man and dog. Once Whack-Ear lost a yard or so in another futile effort to drive the cattle back. Again a clump of sage unsteadied his backward stride, and the steers had surged nearer before his balance was recovered.

Unlimited time seemed to pass as Whack-Ear made his slow, losing fight for ground. The sweat stood on the puncher's face, though the breeze seemed cold at his back. He glanced over his shoulder again. He was a little nearer now. He had come—a third of the way? Hardly. A quarter perhaps. And the cattle had closed the distance between them a little more. Twenty-five yards now. They were coming again. Now the interval was a little less.

The critters were becoming bolder. They no longer stopped suddenly at his yell. He could stop them, but their long strides seemed to eat up the ground at each advance; nor did they always stop at the first yell, nor the second, nor the third. They knew now that a leap into the air means no harm, and that there is no danger in a swinging hat. Only instinctive caution in the presence of man, and, perhaps, the knowledge that their enemies could not get away, was holding them back.

They were twenty yards away; yet it seemed that the distance to that patch of brush had not appreciably decreased. Whack-Ear wondered if, after all, he could find his forty-five quickly enough, even if he were there. They were coming on, and he made weird motions and yelled. Gradually they came to a stop. They were eighteen yards away— Fifteen.

It was a hard thing to stand still when the steers advanced, yet it must be done. Better that they close the distance a little, than that they not be stopped at all. For a long time Whack-Ear kept himself from looking over his shoulder. He made his way backward, always facing the steers, retreating foot by foot until it seemed that surely he must have come most of the way. Then he looked. He had come half way; but the steers were very close. The leading steer pawed, voicing persistently those deep, ominous moans.

Fourteen yards separated man and steers. Thirteen. Twelve. Every time he was forced to pause to front the steers, the puncher lost a little more ground. He realized, now, that he would never reach the patch of brush in time. Splinter trembled, and seemed to cling to Whack-Ear with his paws. His warm tongue suddenly licked the man's hand. The man clutched Splinter closer as he thought of big Tom Six, and knew what that hard-eyed puncher, placed in a similar position, would do.

Calmly, now, with his fear in the past, Whack-Ear waited for the inevitable crisis to come. Not for an instant did he relax his efforts to gain ground. He sought desperately for some new strategy, some impossible feat of resourcefulness that would in some way delay the end. But in the back of his mind he knew that there was no longer any hope.

Twelve yards, now. Eleven. Ten. He could see every sworl of hair on those broad white faces with the staring eyes. He wondered why they did not rush, how it was that he could still hold them back when they were so close.

Then suddenly, the long game came to its end.

Stepping backward in a long stride, Whack-Ear trod on ground that seemed to collapse beneath his foot. A gopher hole, such as had been the beginning of his trouble, was now apparently the end. Desperately the big cowboy sought to regain his balance as he went down, but could not.

He heard the snort of the steers, the sudden wild trample of hooves, and caught a glimpse of horns, and eyes that showed the whites. All this as he fell, flinging Splinter from him. Swiftly Whack-Ear rolled toward the drumming hooves, thus escaping the reaching, hooking horns. He felt a hoof drive through the flare of his chaps, and another grooved his arm. Hooves stumbled against his body, battering him mercilessly. Yet somehow he escaped, and the trampling thunder passed on.

The three steers plunged on many yards, carried by their own momentum. Whack-Ear saw them stop, sliding on braced legs in the moist footing. They turned, and for a moment hesitated with heads up, puzzled that they had somehow missed their mark. He considered getting to his feet to face them again. He thought of dodging, in the hope of obtaining a bull-dog hold; had there been but one or two there might have been a chance. But he lay still, hoping that they would follow Splinter.

Then they sighted him, and snorted as their heads went down. The clods flew from their heels as they lunged forward into the charge. The lust of battle had heated their blood; there was no facing them now, no chance at all, except the desperate, fleeting one that lay in trying the rolling trick again. Whack-Ear hugged the ground, watching. At the exact instant before they hashed him into the ground he would roll into that mad flurry of hooves, hoping to make them miss.

But they did not pass over. The foremost "critter" came to a sliding stop, and the great head came down. Whack-Ear shifted his position like a cat, and a sweeping horn cut the ground where his body had been. He was between the horns. The massive forehead jostled his back as the steer sought to worry him. The sod ripped on either side, but for the instant the animal's very nearness saved his life.

The other two had passed on, pursuing Splinter, perhaps. He heard them rushing back. He heard Splinter give a little yelping gasp of fear, almost in his ear. Then suddenly the steer above him flung up his head with a whistling snort, and whirled away from him. Whack-Ear, still hugging the ground, turned his head to look. An amazed thrill shot through the man.

Splinter had the steer by the ear.

The puncher saw the little dog clinging with his teeth as the steer bellowed and shook his head. For a moment Splinter's grip held; then, the ear tore into ribbons, and the dog was flung to one side. The great animal reached Splinter in a bound before the dog could gain his feet. The horns tossed in a hooking sweep, and Whack-Ear saw the little yellow form spinning through the air.

The other cattle were with the leader, now. A second critter was on Splinter almost before he touched the ground. Again the lunging hook, and the little yellow body turning in the air above the horns. Whack-Ear ripped out a wrenching oath, and, struggling to his feet, dashed after the steers.

Suddenly a furiously ridden horse cannonaded into the group of cattle, crashing headlong into the leading animal. Horse, man, and steer went down, the horse somersaulting and the man flying free. The rider was in the saddle again as the horse scrambled up. A second rider—Whack-Ear recognized the faded red shirt of Whiskers Beck—dashed up with a "whoop hi-yah!" and his snapping rope made the fur fly from a broad white face.

The steers fled. The first horseman—Dixie Kane, to judge by his methods—overtook the hindmost steer, seized the tail, and threw the animal headlong. Whiskers, having ridden in pursuit long enough to get in a few more cuts with his rope, stopped his horse and opened fire. Three times his gun spoke, but except that a shattered horn flew spinning, leaving a smear of blood in its place, the shots took no effect.

Whiskers and Dixie Kane came riding back.

"Well, anyway, I took a handle-bar off one—!" Whiskers remarked.

Whack-Ear was kneeling by the battered form of his little dog. The others dismounted, and stood beside him. The three made a swift examination.

"He's alive," said Whiskers, "he's breathin'."

"His shoulder's tore open clear to the bone," said Dixie Kane.

Whiskers silently jerked off his neckerchief, and with this Whack-Ear clumsily bound up the wound.

"Don't seem to be anything broken, much," Whiskers said at last.

Presently Whiskers produced a flask, and tilted a mouthful of snake-bite remedy down Splinter's throat. At this the little dog coughed, sneezed, and tried to lift his head. Three punchers heaved a sigh of relief.

"If he hadn't come back fer me," said Whack-Ear dazedly, "they never would o' got him."

Whiskers nodded.

Presently, after Dixie had found Whack-Ear's horse, the two cantered on home. Whack-Ear followed at a walk, carrying Splinter in his arms.

AS WHACK-EAR reached the Triangle R, he rode straight to the corral. He placed Splinter gently on the ground and found that the dog was able to walk some. Then he changed his saddle and bridle to the roan, the horse that he owned himself.

Next he rode to the bunkhouse, gathered everything he owned into his bed roll and war bag, and lashed them on to his saddle. Lastly, carrying Splinter, he led the roan to the Old Man's cottage, and walked in.

Old Man Rutherford sprawled in a home-made arm chair, smoking a reflective pipe.

"Mister Rutherford," said Whack-Ear shortly, "I've changed my mind. I quit. Gimme my pay, an' I'll ride."

"No," said the Old Man.

"I don't feel like arguin'," Whack-Ear said. "Where Splinter goes, I go too. If yuh don't wanta pay me now, I'll let yuh know where I'm at, an' yuh can send my check later."

"Whack-Ear," said the Old Man, "a couple o' the boys has beat yuh here. Dixie an' Whiskers—especially Whiskers—has told me a big lie about your dog pullin' a steer offen your back."

"It ain't a lie," Whack-Ear said.

"Lie or no lie," conceded the Old Man, "they used to be plumb against that dog, an' now they're for him. They swear to high heaven that their yarn is true. An' the way the boys is stringin' over on to Splinter's side, it looks like I can't run this show without a dog no more."

The day's bother had shaken up Whack-Ear's mind. For a moment he stood there, looking foolish. Then Splinter whimpered; and Whack-Ear who had been carrying the dog in one arm, sat down on a chair, to make the pup more comfortable.

"So we'll have less of this nonsense," said the Old Man. "——, you *got* to stay."

There was a tentative rapping on the door.

"Come in!" roared Old Man Rutherford.

In came Whiskers Beck.

"I just wanted to say," he offered, "that the boys has took up a little collection of about seventy-one bucks, in favor o' Splinter, an' we figure to buy him a suit o' dog clo'es, or somethin'. Think it out an' leave us know what he'd like."

He started to go out, but at the door he turned, and came back.

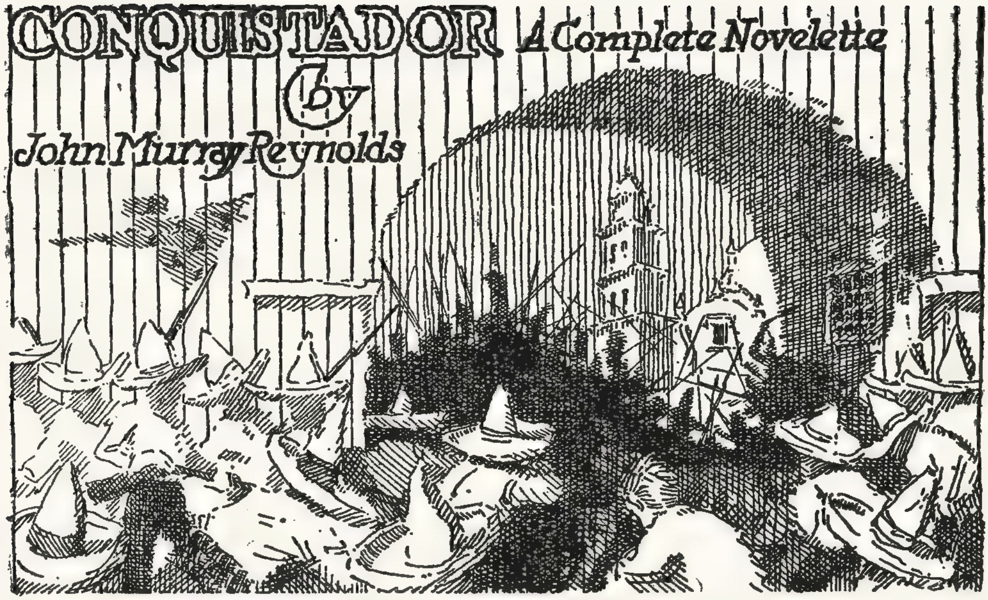
"Say," he began again. "I saved the silver conchas offen that bridle that—that had that accident that time. Mebbe they'd look nice on Splinter's collar, huh?"

CONQUISTADOR

A Complete Novelette

by

John Murray Reynolds



Author of "Medicinal Methods," "El Carcel," etc.

WITH the setting of the coppery red disk of the sun came the mosquitos. What little breeze there had been died entirely and the air grew even more hot and oppressive. The noise of the departing train gradually died away, and the only sound was the drone of the variegated insects.

As far as the eye could reach, cane fields went unbroken to the horizon except for the narrow swath cut by the single railroad track, the even smaller cleared space where the narrow-gage branch line ran off at right angles, the gallows-like hand crane for loading cane on to cars and the makeshift station with its thirty-foot-long platform. A board nailed to a post at the end of the platform bore the name:

Colonia Ceiba Alta

The lone man who had alighted from the train set down his bag, wiped the sweat from his face and slapped perfunctorily at the clustering mosquitos. Six months in the Republic of Baracoa had not inured David Sinclair to mosquitos, but they had at least enabled him to accept them as a necessary evil. Life in Baracoa is full of necessary evils.

The heat seemed to be increasing in intensity in spite of the setting sun. Sweat ran down Sinclair's nose and dripped from the tip; salt sweat set his eyes smarting, and his shirt clung damply to his back. He upended his suitcase and perched on that precarious seat.

"Wonder what's keeping the man?" he inquired of the empty cane fields. "Am I mixed on my dates?"

As if in answer to his question there came the faint popping of a gasoline engine somewhere off to the northward, the direction where a line of hills rose up beyond the cane fields, and Sinclair grunted with relief. Don Pedro Casteliero had not forgotten that he was to visit his *colonia* at this time. Sinclair slapped the mosquitos with a cheerful briskness that caused great mortality among them.

The noise of the gas engine grew louder, and a car appeared in the distance, speeding down the narrow track of the plantation branch line. With its straight front fitted with wind-shield, headlight and miniature cow catcher; with its flat top and its three seats, the car was of the utility type so frequently used over plantations where auto roads are nonexistent and the railroad track is the only highway. A black peon was at the control levers of the car, and a tall, gray-bearded man in white linen waved his hand as he caught sight of Sinclair on the station platform. The car came to a screeching stop, and the man in white alighted and came forward with outstretched hand.

"Conquistador," copyright, 1925, by John Murray Reynolds.

"My friend, I am desolate," he declared. "Believe me that the delay in meeting you was unavoidable. Were you worried?"

"Well, Don Pedro," answered Sinclair with a slow smile, "I'll admit I was pretty relieved when I heard the noise of that chariot of yours. This junction is no place to spend a night."

"Then come. Let us hurry to the hacienda. You are doubtless hungry."

"And thirsty!" amended Sinclair as they climbed aboard.

Two sidings made a triangle of the narrow-gage track, and the driver reversed the car's direction by shifting up one siding and backing down the other. The puttering of the motor rose to a roar as he opened the throttle, and they sped away toward the distant hills.

The sun had set, and in the twilight the fields on either side of the track seemed to rush by with terrific speed. The hills ahead rose steadily from the plain until the darkness blotted them out. The peon switched on the single headlight, but its rays carried a scant fifty feet ahead.

The speed of the car's motion kept the mosquitos away and set up a pleasant breeze. Sinclair leaned back comfortably and asked—

"Well, Don Pedro, how have you been?"

"Well enough, but very busy."

"Busy around the *colonia?*" inquired Sinclair idly. "I thought this was the dead season so far as sugar is concerned."

"It is, but there are other things. I have many interests."

"Such as?"

"We will discuss them in more detail later," replied the Baracoan enigmatically.

They fell silent. Sinclair closed his eyes and allowed the cool rushing movement to lull him into a semi-doze. Casteliero twisted around sidewise and surveyed his guest with a searching, questing gaze that revealed deep concentration of thought.

David Sinclair was twenty-five or so, blond and a trifle inclined to heaviness—with a good-humored face that showed plenty of strength of character. His companion was a middle-aged man with graying hair and beard, deep-set, sorrowful eyes and a perfect control of his facial expressions that effectually masked his feelings upon all occasions.

Somewhere ahead of the car and above it appeared lights. At first they were mere flickering specks; gradually they took on strength and steadiness and then the outlines of broad windows. The track wound up into the foot hills, trees appeared from the darkness, shot past and vanished behind, then buildings bulked ahead and the peon slowed down his motor. A long limestone wall suddenly flanked the track on one side, sheds and outbuildings on the other. The car rounded a corner of the wall and stopped at the edge of a broad lawn that led across to the stucco façade and hospitably gleaming windows of a large rambling house of the old Spanish style.

"Welcome to Ceiba Alta, my friend," said Casteliero, swinging to the ground.

DINNER was a meal that brought back to Sinclair the almost forgotten refinements of civilization. He was the recently appointed traveling superintendent of the fruit company, a high position for a man of his years, and his duties kept him continually on the move. For four out of the last six months he had been eating the cheap, dirty fare of small Latin-American hotels or the rice and plantains of peons in dirt-floored, palm-thatched huts; and the well-cooked food, clean linen and generally pleasant surroundings were like a dream. Señora Casteliero was a perfect hostess, Don Pedro an interesting and conversational host. Sinclair was too contented with this change from his recent *al fresco* existence, too effervescently talkative in the presence of people of his own class to notice a certain slight but distinct air of restraint about his host and hostess and the frequent exchange of questioning glances.

They dined in the patio, the table being set close by the murmuring fountain. After they finished the table was cleared, and Señora Casteliero left the men to their cigars and wine. Sinclair chose a long panetela and a glass of the muscatel of Cataluna, and would have preferred to sit in silence and stare at the brilliant stars gleaming through the fronds of the royal palms growing in the patio, but Don Pedro insisted on talking.

"How do you like this Baracoa of ours, my friend," he asked, "now that you have really seen something of it?"

"At a time and place like this I consider it an earthly paradise," replied the American. "But when I get in the dirt and varied corruption of most of your cities, it is another story."

"All that could be remedied," said Don Pedro seriously, fixing his guest with his sorrowful eyes. "This Baracoa of ours, like so many other tropical countries, is the Garden of Eden with the serpent in control. Popular government has been given to our people. Many of them are like children, and they do not know how to use it. The government is in the hands of the worst element, of selfish, grasping politicians whose only thought is of self."

"Your government certainly needs changing." Sinclair spoke idly, only half listening, still staring up at the stars.

"A proper administration could remedy all the evils that sap the strength of these lands. Cleanliness, thrift, honesty in administration, industry—all these are possible to us. Almost any step is justifiable that will bring them to us. Do you not think so, my friend?"

"You are probably right," answered Sinclair, wondering if there was not a certain method in the other's remarks. "I have not thought about it much. Let well enough alone has come to be my motto when it comes to things that do not immediately concern me."

"But this does concern you. It concerns all who must live in Baracoa. Better living conditios wnould affect you most vitally. And think how your employer, the fruit company, would benefit. Think of the amount it must now pay to corrupt officials. It would benefit greatly by an increase of prosperity throughout the country."

"Yes, I guess you're right," Sinclair answered again, wondering why Casteliero seemed so anxious to have him express himself as in favor of governmental reform.

He usually believed in going directly to the heart of a matter, and was considering a direct question on the subject when he heard the approaching hoof beats of a galloping horse.

The night was fairly still, and the sound of the hoofs rang clear. Casteliero's expression did not change, but Sinclair suddenly realized that there had been a vague air of listening about him while he talked and that this was the thing for which he had been waiting. When the horse slowed down and the hoof beats were lost somewhere at the back of the house, Don Pedro rose to his feet.

"It is doubtless some traveler seeking shelter for the night," he said carelessly. "We have them here often. If you will have the kindness to excuse me I will see what it is. You will find a number of American magazines on the table there—a trifle old, but it is possible that you have not seen all of them."

When he was gone Sinclair picked up a magazine and glanced idly at the pages without reading them. The dreaminess had dropped from him and his mind was now keenly alert. Casteliero's manner puzzled him greatly. He knew him for a substantial planter and a man of culture and education. They had seen a good deal of each other in a business way, and a real friendship had grown up between them. That Casteliero was greatly preoccupied about something that he wanted to conceal was beyond doubt. Sinclair strained his ears for any unusual sound.

At first he heard only the customary night sounds of a hacienda. The palm fronds above his head rustled faintly and the fountain beside him murmured softly and musically. From outside the house there came the deep-toned note of a chorus of tree toads and the occasional cry of a night bird. There was a faint murmur of conversation from the direction of the servants' quarters. In the same vicinity some gallant was serenading his *enamorata*, accompanying his song with the tinkling of a guitar, singing a plaintive popular melody in the tempo of a *danza:*

"Quiereme mucho,
Dulce Maria."

To the right of Sinclair a shutter clicked softly, and he experienced that indefinable sensation of being secretly observed. Carelessly tossing down the magazine, he reached for a match to relight his cigar, and took advantage of the act to glance in the direction of the telltale sound. That side of the patio was formed by a long, shuttered partition, and he noticed that one of the narrow rows of wooden slats had been opened so that any one on the other side could peer out. He was still undecided as to whether he should take any action, when Don Pedro opened a door in the partition and walked out.

"I owe you an apology, my friend," he said, "an apology and an explanation."

SINCLAIR was staring at the tall young man in mud-splashed riding clothes who had followed Don Pedro through the door, and he now rose to his feet. Recognition and doubt were both visible on his face, but the doubt vanished as the newcomer came closer.

"John Rodgers!" he exclaimed, "I didn't know you were in Baracoa!"

"Very few people have any such idea, Dave," answered the other. "Which is probably a very good thing for my health just at present."

"I don't quite understand."

"Suppose we sit down, and I'll explain several things. I think it would be a good idea to close that door leading to the front, Don Pedro."

The three men sat in closely placed chairs. The newcomer unslung the long machete from his belt, but left the twin automatics in place.

"You knew me in college as John Rodgers," he began, "but my real name happens to be Juan Jose Rodriguez. That name probably doesn't mean much to you. If you were a Baracoan it would mean a great deal.

"For sometime past I have been working with a group of friends, including Don Pedro here, to free our Republic from the corrupt Montalvo faction which has ruled it for so long. I suppose you would call it a revolution. We have been anxious to interest some Americans in our cause, and when Don Pedro mentioned your name I wondered if you were the David Sinclair I had known. Accordingly I asked him to invite you here and then arrange to get a look at you first through those shutters. I have to be careful to be seen by as few people as possible, and I wanted to be sure that you were the right man."

"Why all the caution, John—or rather Juan? Are you already known as a revolutionist? You said something about your name being well known."

An expression of deep bitterness and sadness spread over the lean, handsome face of the young Baracoan.

"My name is well known," he answered grimly, "but not for myself. My father, who also bore it, was once president of this Republic—the best president any nation of Latin America has ever had. Those were the days of happiness and prosperity. Montalvo and his treacherous friends managed to acquire a strong following by promises of rich reward. My father was warned, but had too generous a faith in his fellow countrymen to heed the warning.

"Then the blow fell. By a well planned coup the Montalvistas seized the capital city, proclaimed martial law and arrested my father. They accused him of treason. He, in whose little finger there was more honor than in their whole rotten crew. There was a mere mockery of a trial, and within two hours his bullet-riddled body lay against the fortress wall. They came for me, also—I, who was but a boy, but friends managed to get me out of the city. I well remember that wild night ride into the hills. At the end my friends drove the empty coach off a cliff into a mountain torrent and it finally came to be believed I had died in that manner. I was smuggled to the States and educated under the name of John Rodgers. Now I am back. I have sworn to do nothing else until I have brought about the downfall of Montalvo. Do you wonder that I am bitter, Dave? I am driven both by the desire to bring better times to the country from which I was so long an exile and by the memory of my murdered father."

There was silence for a few moments. Rodriguez stared fixedly into space with a haunting horror still showing in his eyes. Casteliero moodily watched the tiny cascades of the fountain. Sinclair for the first time realized that there was an unsuspected undercurrent of seriousness, of hate and greed and passion, and also of high-hearted idealism beneath the comic opera surface of the government of Baracoa. Rodriguez continued more calmly.

"I came back to the country in secret, and we have been laying our plans for some time. Montalvo probably senses the unrest, but he does not know on whom to lay his hands to stop it. If my existence should become known to him he would detach half the army to look for me."

"Would they be likely to find you?"

"I don't think so, Dave. I hide by day and do my traveling by night. And, as you learned from that little incident of the shutters, I am pretty careful."

"Are you going to tell our young friend what it is that we hope for from him?"

"Yes, Don Pedro. Frankly, Dave, we want you with us."

"You mean you want me to fight in your revolution?"

"Not necessarily, though we may later be glad of as good a shot as I remember you used to be. There is more to this kind of a war than the actual fighting. We want some American moral support. When the storm breaks it would help a lot to have you come out in our favor. Any fruit company man is a personage in Baracoa. Even if you can't persuade the company that it would be worth its while to back us, at least you should be able to keep it from giving Montalvo any support. You know what the support of the fruit company means in Baracoan politics. How about it, Dave?"

Sinclair considered the proposition in silence, throwing away the cigar and taking out his pipe as a better aid to thought. The distant troubador was still singing his plaintive song and the tree toads' chorus was louder. A gentle breeze had come up —a cool, clean breeze that swept away the last of the dark jungle smells that rise up around Ceiba Alta when the air is still. It was hard for Sinclair to realize that his old friend sitting a few feet away from him was an outlaw and a fugitive and that this talk of rebellion and intrigue was deadly serious. As a hard-headed business man he was inclined to regard the proposition as an idealistic chimera, but he could not bring himself to a flat refusal. The tropics do strange things to the souls of men, and there was an old unrest stirring within him, an unrest reminiscent of the days before the strain of business had driven all such things from his mind. The low, musical voice of Casteliero broke in upon his thoughts.

"I THINK, Juan, that we had better give our friend an opportunity to think things over. He will now look at Baracoan life and conditions through new eyes. Perhaps he will notice things that he overlooked before, and I feel sure that time will bring him around to our side."

"Of course, Dave. I don't want to hurry your decision at all. Think it over, I will manage to fix up some way to see you again in a few weeks. We do not intend to strike for some time yet."

"Do you intend to start an active revolution throughout the country any time soon?"

"We are organizing and getting arms and making everything ready, but we still have one hope of gaining our end by peaceful means."

"A most improbable and quixotic hope," put in Don Pedro dryly.

"In a short time there will be a general presidential election. Elections have meant little in Baracoa during the past fifteen years, the Montalvo faction falsifying the results, but we are going to give the method a last chance. The candidate running against Montalvo is one Querol, not a man of our immediate circle, but an honest one and a man we would be content to see in the presidential chair. We will wait until after the election."

"Incidentally," Casteliero took the thread of the conversation, "Querol is going to visit the city of Las Lomas, twenty miles from here, next week on an electioneering tour. Las Lomas is about equally divided between the Montalvo faction and our own supporters, and I am a little fearful of the result."

"I really do not think you need fear trouble, Don Pedro," replied Rodriguez, "I am cautioning all our people against trouble of any sort."

"Can you caution the torrent? Can you warn the hurricane?" answered Casteliero grimly. "You have lived too long in the north, Juan, you have forgotten our national temperament. But we can only hope for the best."

Rodriguez stood up.

"I'm for the road," he said, buckling on his machete and looking to his holsters. "I hope to make the hacienda of Don Tomas Yzaguirre before sunrise."

"How are the roads?"

"The rains have turned the lowland trails into quagmires, but they are not bad here in the hills. *Adios*, Dave. Think over what we have said between now and when I see you again."

Casteliero accompanied Rodriguez out back. A minute later Sinclair heard his friend canter away into the night.

TEN sultry days had passed their slow way, and Sinclair sat at a sidewalk table of a café in the inland city of Las Lomas. Since noon the city had taken on the look of a fiesta. The Baracoan colors were displayed from many of the houses, the police band played *danzas* in the plaza, and most of the stores were closed. The *bodegas*—

grocery and wine shops—and the assorted cafés, *cantinas*, *fondas*, *posadas* and other eating and drinking places remained open and did a good business. But all of the other stores were prudently closed and shuttered.

The crowds strolling along the Avenida Bolivar were a little different from the ordinary holiday assortment. Their talk was inclined to be fitful and their laughter strained. It was particularly noticeable that as the hour for the arrival of the special train bearing the electioneering party approached, there were fewer and fewer women to be seen on the streets. At one o'clock there had been quite a number, but when the police band deserted the plaza and marched down to the railroad station, there was not a woman to be seen. A political meeting in Latin America has all the potentialities of nitroglycerine, and the prudent citizens summoned their women indoors, even though they themselves remained in the streets to be sure of missing nothing.

Sinclair left the hot, odorous café with its buzzing flies and smell of stale beer and went down the street to the Hotel Vivac. This hotel was the oldest building in Las Lomas, its nucleus being the old fort that the Spaniards had built to guard these lowlands against raids from the hills. It had been a barracks for many years after that, and still maintained a very fortress-like appearance with its loopholed walls and single doorway leading to the patio through a broad arched passage. As a hotel it was more than lacking in sanitary arrangements and other modern comforts, but its history and its picturesque character drew many tourists.

Sinclair was seeking a cool spot on one of the verandas lining the patio when he felt a light touch on his arm and turned around to see Juan Rodriguez. The latter drew him down one of the hallways opening from the patio and then into a small bedroom, closing the door behind him.

"Aren't you taking something of a risk, Juan?" asked the American.

"A little, but I was afraid to stay away. I am beginning to believe that Don Pedro is right about the danger of this afternoon's affair."

"Why?"

"Because this is Baracoa. Querol and his friends are coming merely to make speeches, but the Montalvistas are strong in this city, and there may be trouble."

"Do you think any one recognized you as you came through the streets?"

Rodriguez grinned, a broad American grin rather unusual for a Latin.

"I am —— sure they didn't, Dave, because I did not come through the streets. This hotel was the military stronghold of the place in the old days, and some of its secrets have been handed down in my family from my *conquistador* ancestors. An underground passageway leads from the cellars of this place to the inclosed yard of a warehouse in the old part of town. The masonry of the passage is still good in spite of its age. I came with a dozen friends, and we left our horses in the warehouse yard—the place now belongs to one of my cousins—and came into the hotel through the passage."

There followed a few minutes of talk on minor subjects, and then Rodriguez asked—

"Have you decided to come with us, Dave?" he asked.

Sinclair smiled.

"Well, old-timer," he said, "I have thought about it a lot. I am not much on revolutions as a general thing. They go well enough in the movies, but are bad medicine. But I kept my eyes open, and have come to realize that what you and Don Pedro said about the condition of the country and the people is true. I guess you can count on me, though I warn you I'm a tenderfoot when it comes to overthrowing governments and taking a fall out of tyrants and that sort of thing."

"Good boy, Dave. I knew you'd come through. We'll get together some time tonight and decide in what way you can be of the most help to us. There is the band beginning to play. Let's go out where we can watch things."

They went out together and leaned against the front wall of the hotel in the shadow of the awning stretched over the great arched entrance. The Avenida Bolivar was lined with men standing three and four deep along its entire length. Like most Latin-American city streets, it was comparatively narrow and the sidewalks were no more than three or four feet wide. The back row of spectators stood with their backs against the house walls while the others filled the sidewalks and occasionally overflowed out into the street itself. They were a motley assortment of bare-footed peons, booted and spurred planters, linen-clad *caballeros* and scrubby townspeople. A fair number of federal soldiers off duty were scattered through the crowd, and Rodriguez pointed out several quiet and capable looking young men as members of his own particular faction. A few mounted rurales made a pretense of keeping the crowd back from the center of the street.

THE long, loop-holed wall of the Vivac occupied nearly a whole block, a corner *cantina* using the space between the Vivac and the corner. The opposite side of the street was occupied by a row of private houses with their typical forbidding fronts—a sheer wall, a huge wooden door, and two or three barred and shuttered windows. From a few of the houses timid feminine faces peered out between the shutters.

Up the street from the railroad station came the police band, leading the procession and playing the swinging, crashing notes of "El Conquistador," the Baracoan national song. The crowd burst into cheers and cries of "*Viva Querol! Viva el conservatismo!*" A Latin-American crowd is always ready to cheer a procession, irrespective of its political affiliations.

After the band came a half-dozen police, and then the Conservative candidate himself, Ramon Cuevas Querol y Velasco, holding his hat in his hand and bowing to the cheering crowds. By his side walked the police lieutenant in command of the guard of honor, and behind them walked about a hundred political associates who had come up to Las Lomas on the special train along with the candidate. Sinclair heard Rodriguez breathe a sigh of relief as the procession went past, all smiles and bows and hat waving and *vivas*, with the band playing gayly and the crowds throwing serpentnia.

"It seems to be going all right after all, Dave," he said. "I will admit I was getting pretty worried."

The intention was to proceed to the plaza in front of the cathedral and there make the electioneering speeches, and Rodriguez and Sinclair followed along to the corner and then climbed up on one of the café tables, better to watch the further progress of the parade. They had just mounted onto the table when the cataclysm occurred.

The police lieutenant walking with Querol dropped back a step and laid his hand on his revolver. It may have been due to some entirely innocent motive, it may have been some mere idle movement; it may have been the threat it was taken for. None will ever know. One of the men in the front rank of the following paraders immediately drew a revolver and shot the lieutenant squarely through the head. Rodriguez stiffened suddenly, and Sinclair heard him mutter in an agonized whisper:

"The fools! The utter fools! Right into their hands!"

The killing of the police lieutenant let loose a storm that transformed the peaceful gala scene into a holocaust. The six police spun around as their leader fell, and six shots coming almost as one riddled the man who had first fired. From the bunched paraders behind and from their sympathizers in the crowd came a scattering volley that dropped four out of the six police and killed one of the band.

After that everything became confusion and disorder. The ranks of the paraders and the lines of the spectators became one shouting, surging, milling mass with pistol shots cracking out in its midst. The Conservatives had rather the better of it at first. Hiding Querol in their center and swollen to a sizable force by sympathizers from the crowd, they formed into a compact mass and retreated slowly back down the Avenida Bolivar toward the railroad station. Six or eight of their number lay motionless in the area they had just left, in addition to several of their opponents and the slain police. Bullets ricocheting from the walls of the houses lining the narrow street had killed three of the luckless noncombatant band and wounded a number of the spectators.

The retreating Conservatives made good time down the street, the rear rank walking backwards with their revolvers flashing at every other step. The Montalvistas followed noisily but warily at about the limit of pistol range. It began to look as if the retreat to the station would be effected in good order and without further casualties, and Rodriguez and Sinclair left their café table to join the retiring force.

Just as the rear guard arrived abreast of the great door of the Vivac there came the crash of a volley from the opposite direction, a volley with a deeper, deadlier note than the pistol firing which had gone before. A detachment of federal troops had come into the Avenida Bolivar from a side street, cutting off the retreat to the station and pouring in a murderous volley from their service rifles at short range.

The mass of the Conservatives was thrown into confusion by this new development and, after milling around for a few seconds, began to pour through the arched passage leading to the patio of the hotel. Last of all came the group of young men that had fought the rear guard action, and as Sinclair entered along with them, he recognized several of the men Rodriguez had pointed out as his friends. The great iron studded doors at the end of the passage were slammed shut as the last men passed through, and volunteers quickly brought the heavy tables from the long bar room to pile against the doors for greater security.

Rodriguez had taken active command of the defense, Querol being very evidently incapable of the task. There were about 250 Conservatives within the hotel walls, including those who had come on the train with Querol, and Rodriguez divided them into five companies of fifty each, assigning one to each wall and holding the last in reserve in the patio.

All were armed with automatics or revolvers, an average of about thirty rounds per man, but the unexpectedness of the affray had kept them from having more effective weapons. One does not usually carry a rifle around the city streets, even in Baracoa. The only rifles among the defenders were those of a dozen young men who had come with Juan Rodriguez and had left them below in the tunnel on arrival. A fair number of the peons had machetes, and Rodriguez chose most of the men so armed for the reserve detachment that waited in the big patio.

THERE were also forty or fifty tourists within the hotel, and Rodriguez ordered them all to the kitchens as the safest place. Sinclair found him striding nervously back and forth across the patio, his face pale with impotent wrath.

"Just listen!" he said bitterly. "Just listen to that!"

From the four sides of the hotel came the crack of the defenders' revolvers, few and scattering. Outside the walls sounded the steady, rolling fire of the guns of the beleaguers, service rifles all. What had started out as a street brawl had been turned into an incipient revolution, and the federal troops had taken over the siege of the Vivac. Rodriguez swore under his breath.

"Licked! Defeated before we started! All because a few hot-headed fools couldn't hold their hands! We can't possibly hold out over four or five hours."

"Will they try to take the place by assault?"

"Probably. We haven't a chance, caught unawares like this with practically no rifles. The worst of it all is the effect it will have on the rest of the country. Montalvo will be stronger than ever. He has been in power so long he has built up a tradition that he is unbeatable. This defeat will spoil all the work of the past two years and strengthen the tradition of his invincibility. We will never get the mass of the peons to rise against him now."

As he spoke, a peon came out on to one of the verandas, glanced around for Rodriguez and then came running toward them. All at once he faltered in mid-stride and crumpled into a clump of hibiscus. At the same moment one of the men held in reserve in the patio staggered away from his fellows with both hands trying to stem the scarlet stream that spouted from his throat, an expression of dazed surprize on his face. Suddenly, just as this man dropped to his knees, the air was full of the drone of flying metal and the smack of bullets. Tiles cracked and broke on the roof of the west veranda, more men dropped in the ranks of the reserves, long splinters flew from the wooden veranda pillars, leaves and twigs dropped from the trees and bushes, white splashes appeared on the surface of the old gray limestone, bullets struck on walk and wall. The reserve broke, and ran for the shelter of the east veranda which seemed unaffected by the rain of death. After a glance upward Rodriguez followed them, shouting as he ran:

"Keep out of the patio! They've planted a machine gun in the cathedral tower and it commands most of the courtyard."

There came a temporary lull in the siege. The western half of the patio remained empty except for the sprawling bodies and hordes of buzzing flies, and the machine gun spoke only at intervals—a few rounds as a warning that it was still in place.

The defenders were hoarding their scanty cartridges, and even the rifle fire of the surrounding troops, an inaccurate but continuous fire at the loop holes which had had considerable effect, seemed to slacken. The bells of the cathedral, unmoved by battle, chimed the hour of five.

The lull was broken by a dull explosion. One of the soldiers had crawled along on his belly close to the wall of the Vivac, below the line of vision from the loop holes, and exploded a bomb against the big front door. The ancient wood was blown into kindling, the reenforcing pile of tables scattered, and the way to the patio lay open.

The soldiers from the houses across the street charged for the entrance, and were half-way through the tunnel before Rodriguez could gather his startled reserves. As the troops emerged into the patio with the sunlight flashing on their leveled bayonets, Rodriguez' fifty fresh men met them with swift thrusting knife and bone-crushing machete and drove them back into the dimness of the tunnel mouth.

Within that dark passageway raged a fierce struggle that seemed to last for hours, but actually occupied about forty-five seconds. Machetes were thrown aside, a rifle became an encumbrance, and it was knife point and pistol butt until the thronging mass of blue denim uniforms seemed to melt away all at once, and the assault was over. A barricade was quickly piled across the street end of the passage, eight or ten men posted there with rifles taken from fallen soldiers, and the siege of the Vivac quieted down again.

When the federals charged the passage Sinclair had started forward with the rest, but Rodriguez had pushed him back.

"Please stay out of this, Dave," he had said. "You'll be of more service later if you remain a noncombatant now."

After the repulse of the assault Sinclair found him in the long barroom beside the body of the dying Querol who was propped against the wall. The rather pompous politician was no soldier, but he had fought valiantly in that mêlée in the passage until three bayonets laid him low. His lungs were pierced, he was beyond speech, and his hoarse panting grew weaker at every breath. Sinclair drew his friend aside.

"That was a great defense, Juan."

Rodriguez smiled faintly.

"Yes, but we couldn't do it again."

"Why not?"

"I had about fifty men there in the patio five minutes ago. Now there are less than thirty. A number of the men at the loopholes around the walls have been hit, too. And then there is another thing."

He nodded toward Querol who was feebly moving his head from side to side and whose eyes were beginning to glaze.

"He is the official head of this affair, they will lose heart with his death. And it is very near the end of the day. I know my people. They lack the dogged tenacity of you northerners. They will not much longer stick by a cause as lost as this one."

A few minutes later the men behind the archway barricade called that a flag of truce was coming. Rodriguez shouted to everybody to cease firing, though there was little enough going on with only five or six rounds left, and climbed on to the barricade. An officer of the federal garrison advanced to within about thirty feet of the door and then called that all within the Vivac would be allowed to go free if they laid down their arms and surrendered Querol.

Rodriguez shouted back that Querol was dead, whereupon the officer replied that the rest of the terms still held. Rodriguez asked for ten minutes consideration, and then called all the defenders together in the patio. He climbed onto an old brass cannon that had been placed as a monument to the original Spaniards and put the question, knowing in his heart what the answer would be. A few of his friends shouted—

"We're with you, Juan. Fight on!"

But the mass of the others shook their heads doubtfully. After a few minutes' talk a bearded old *colono* stepped out as spokesman.

"It would be well to accept their terms, *caballero*. The battle is lost. Of what avail to fight on? We are men of family, we are planters or business men of this locality. Here is a chance to withdraw with honor and yet without further loss. It would be folly not to accept it."

A low murmur of assent greeted his words, their cold logic was unassailable. Some of his friends spoke to Rodriguez. He listened and nodded and again held up his hand for silence.

"Very well, *amigos y companeros*, so be it. You have fought well, no man may speak against you. At the end of the ten minutes tear down the barricade and go in peace to your homes. There are a few of us that may not go in peace. We will depart by a way we know of while there is still time. All we ask is that you say nothing of us to the federals. *Adios*, and God be with you."

He jumped down from the cannon and walked quickly toward the cellars, followed by his friends. Sinclair would have gone with him, but he said:

"No, Dave. This doesn't end here, but we must change all our plans. Just pretend you were hiding with the tourists and carry on in your ordinary routine until you hear from me again. And don't worry about us. We will be all right. So long!"

A hasty hand-clasp, and he was gone. Sinclair joined the crowd of excited, thrilled and somewhat frightened tourists in the kitchens while the erstwhile revolutionists piled their arms in the center of the patio and departed. The bodies were removed, the wounded taken to the hospital, hotel servants busied themselves eradicating the traces of battle, the shutters were thrown open and the tables replaced in the long barroom. Three battered one-horse coaches again took their stand in front of the door. The Hotel Vivac had returned to normal.

DURING the weeks that followed David Sinclair was traveling around Baracoa almost continually. One day he sat in a café in the seaport town of Rio Largo and idly listened to the low talk of two citizens at the next table.

"What think you of that affair at the Vivac in Las Lomas, Don Pepe?" queried the larger of the two, whose soiled tan linens were entirely and indecorously buttonless.

"Take care, little one," replied the other, who was a vivacious and white-bearded man about a third the size of the companion thus addressed. "The wise man curbs his tongue."

Thus admonished the other dropped his voice to a tone so low that a man less sharp of hearing than Sinclair could not have distinguished the words.

"They say that young Juan Rodriguez, son of the old Don Juan Rodriguez that was, led the fighters."

"So I, too, have heard, but did any actually see him?"

"*Quien sabe*?"

"Old Don Juan was a man. I could wish—"

"What could you wish, Don Pepe?"

"Nay. What has an old man such as I to do with wishing? Let us take a stroll to the Centro Gallego."

Sinclair was more than surprized to hear the above and wondered how the fact of Juan's being in Baracoa had become known. That it was widely known became very evident in the next few days, as he heard him talked of in a dozen different places. The tale seemed to grow with the telling. Sinclair heard how Rodriguez had appeared from nowhere to lead two score men to victory over a battallion; how with a dozen companions he had routed a regiment; how alone and single-handed he had eluded a pursuing army.

Juan Rodriguez began to take on some of the attributes of a legendary character. Some audacious pamphleteer put out a catchy, jingling ballad extolling him as a modern Robin Hood. Its sale was forbidden by the Montalvo government, but it had seized on the popular fancy, and men hummed it softly and street urchins whistled it loudly from Rio Largo to Monte Verde.

Considering all this, Sinclair wondered whether these rumors had started as accidently as he had at first supposed. That they considerably worried Montalvo was shown by the prompt suppressing of two newspapers that had published some of them.

Rumor held Rodriguez' headquarters to be in the Cienagua de Sombras, the Swamp of Shadows—that great expanse of unexplored and believed impassable, marshy jungle-land, lying along the coast between Rio Largo and Miranda. In view of this, Sinclair was surprized to receive a note asking him to be at the Posada of La Vaca the next evening. He was at the time in the village of Perico, far from the swamp, and recalled the inn of La Vaca as a small, dirty hostelry on the edge of town. The note was unsigned, but was in Juan's writing. The peon who brought it was gone before he had read the note half through.

Sinclair wandered casually into the front room of the *posada* shortly after dark that evening. It was a corner room, entirely open on the two outer sides except for the columns supporting the floor above. A rough bar occupied one of the remaining sides and the fourth was a bare wall pierced by several doors. A picture of a cow, the namesake of the place, was rudely painted on the wall behind the bar. The only light was from the three dim and flickering oil lamps, and Sinclair stood in the outer shadows for a moment, looking closely at the dozen or so men scattered among the tables. All were peons, cane cutters or small farmers, and after a brief survey the American entered and took a seat at a corner table.

THE proprietor of the place walked over to him with a peculiar shuffle, his bare feet slapping on the floor, and inquired his wishes. Feeling a trifle hungry, Sinclair ordered coffee and a sandwich, but the coffee was full of dead mosquitos and the sandwich was even dirtier. He pushed them aside, lighted his pipe and awaited developments.

The host had disappeared through one of the doors in the back wall, and he now returned, served a customer who was shouting loudly for *cerveza* and then came over to Sinclair.

"There is a very fine view of the river valley to be obtained from the back windows, señor."

"Thanks, but I guess I can get along without seeing it," replied Sinclair idly, his thoughts elsewhere.

"But the valley is of an especial beautifulness in the moonlight, señor," continued the host in a pleading tone.

There was no moon that night, and the American looked up sharply to find the other's eye fixed on him with a peculiar intentness. Sinclair grunted, rose and followed him through one of the doors and down a passage to another door. He opened it to find a small room, with Juan Rodriguez leaning back in a chair with his feet on the window sill.

After the first words of greeting Sinclair asked—

"Did you know that the news of your being in Baracoa and having fought at Las Lomas had leaked out?"

"Not leaked out, Dave, old man," answered the Baracoan with a broad smile. "We spread the news ourselves. Tell me, what do they say about us?"

"You would scarcely know yourself, Juan, you are becoming a legendary character, a sort of Sampson and King Arthur and Robin Hood all in one, with a touch of George Washington and Simon Bolivar."

"Good! That is just what we want. It is working beautifully. What else have you heard?"

"Not so much else except that Montalvo is worried—"

"He will be worried a whole lot more before we get through!"

"—and that he is planning to send a strong force to the Swamp of Shadows to hunt you out."

"Fine! It couldn't be better. I hope he does."

"Is your hiding place so secure?"

"I have never even been in the Cienagua de Sombras, Dave. We—there are eighteen of us besides myself—are hiding in a secluded place in the hills back of Las Lomas. That rumor about the swamp is all part of our plan. Montalvo defeated us thoroughly and well in that first attempt, and we are going to fight him differently now. We will give him a shadowy enemy that he can't lay his hands on. When those wild rumors have been repeated often enough men will begin to believe that there is something behind them.

"A little later we will begin to make occasional raids, a harassing policy that will annoy Montalvo without giving him anything he can really fight against. It is the psychological hazard we have to overcome, Dave. I am convinced that most of the people would really be glad to see Montalvo overthrown, but he has been in the saddle so long he has managed to impress them all with his invincibility. He has them buffaloed. Once we can break that tradition the rest will be easy."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Help the rumors on their way. If you are careful you can do it without arousing any suspicion. Mention us casually in your talk with business men around the country. Probably they will bring up the subject themselves by repeating some tale they have heard. Help it along a little. Listen interestedly and express the opinion that it is probably true; that I probably am gathering large numbers of men and guns somewhere in the heart of the swamps, and that it would not surprize you if I won out in the end.

"Coming from an American, and one in your position, this will probably have considerable effect. Then you might add a few details. Say you have heard of men who saw a shipload of machine guns being smuggled into the swamps at the dark of the moon. Montalvo is a clever man, but we will fight him with weapons he won't know how to guard against. We won't have any poison gas in this war of ours, but poison words will do the work as well or better."

SINCLAIR proceeded to carry out Juan's requests to the letter. In his business trips he talked with many men of more or less prominence and importance, and always he found opportunity for a guarded discussion of the political state of affairs. He could sense a growing tension, and came to the conclusion that others beside himself were helping to spread the rumors. Some of the merchants even made guarded inquiries with reference to how the fruit company and American capital in general would be likely to regard such a revolution, but Sinclair was careful not to commit himself. Any man may discuss rumors and express opinions about their truth, but it is another matter to indicate actual willingness for such a revolution to occur. There was too much likelihood of his words being reported to the government.

For some time this gradual weakening of the Montalvo morale went on, and then there occurred the first event of a more positive sort.

A shipment of rifle cartridges for the government was landed at Rio Largo and temporarily stored in the customs house. That night the old building caught fire. A few near-by residents who saw the flames and ran toward the fire found the street blocked by mounted men who were heavily armed. A detachment of half a dozen Rurales who attempted to force their way through ran into a well directed rifle fire that drove them back in confusion with the loss of three of their number.

A little while later the inhabitants of the near-by houses who were watching from their windows saw the strange horsemen wheel and gallop away. By this time the old building was burning so fiercely that no one even attempted to put the fire out, and two hundred thousand rounds of government ammunition went up in smoke.

By the next morning half the country knew that Juan Rodriguez had led his men into Rio Largo and fired the customs house and the government supplies therein. Their tracks were lost amid the trodden dust of the main highway that led to the east, the direction where lay the Cienagua de Sombras.

Opinion varied as to the number of the riders. While careful questioning revealed no one who had actually seen more than a dozen or so at any one time, there had been so much riding to and fro that estimates of their number varied all the way from fifty to three hundred. Some peons beyond the city who had heard them singing "El Conquistador" as they rode back toward the swamp, claimed there were nearly half a thousand.

When told of the raid, Montalvo flew into a violent rage and despatched a hundred Rurales to garrison Rio Largo and make a thorough investigation. The Rurales were the backbone of his strength, a well trained body of veterans far more to be depended upon than the regular army. The detachment that was sent to Rio Largo was drawn from an inland post, their place being taken by a company of infantry from the garrison of Las Lomas. This company marched to its new post, moved into the barracks vacated by the Rurales, posted sentinels and turned in for a well earned rest after the unaccustomed long march.

Somewhere around midnight one of the sentries was awakened from the deep slumber he considered his privilege by the disturbing sensation of a rifle muzzle digging into his ribs. Before he was fully awake he was bound, gagged and gently laid on his back in the shadow of some bushes. The other sentry, who happened to be awake at the time by some freak of circumstance, was stalked from the rear and treated in the same way.

Then dark figures crept toward the long building of the barracks. A minute later the lights were switched on—the barracks boasted the luxury of electric lights supplied by the dynamos of a near-by sugar mill—and the hundred men in the long room blinked sleepy eyes to see a tall young man leaning against the door jamb, toying with a pair of automatics.

"I entreat you not to be rash, *caballeros*," he said softly. "My men are at all the windows."

Rifle muzzles could be clearly seen at ten or fifteen of the windows, and no one cared to make further test of the truth of the stranger's assertion. A sergeant inquired with an attempt at dignity—

"And who are you?"

The stranger smiled a twisted smile.

"Men call me many things," he replied. "And I rather think your worthy president believes I am the devil. My name happens to be Rodriguez."

"El Conquistador!"

The whisper ran from cot to cot. The Baracoan public, ever eager for nicknames, had applied that name to Rodriguez since his men had sung that song as they rode away into the night after the affair at Rio Largo.

"It pains me to disturb your well earned rest, *caballeros*," he continued, "but I must ask all of you to get quickly and noiselessly and also promptly out of your cots and stand against that wall. Please elevate your hands in the air as you do so."

Mindful of the rifle muzzles that had gleamed in the shadows beyond the wide windows a moment before, the dazed *soldados* docilely trooped to the blank north wall and stood facing it.

"Colonel Menendez, send in ten men!"

El Conquistador had raised his voice a trifle and, at his command, ten riflemen filed in the door and strung out along the aisle between the two rows of cots, their weapons menacing the backs of the soldiers lining the wall. Rodriguez vanished, and for ten minutes there was an uncomfortable silence in the barracks. Now and then one of the prisoners would become a little restless and start to lower his hands or turn around, but a sharp hiss from one of the ten warders and the suggestive slap of a hand on a rifle stock immediately brought about a return to the *status quo*.

* * *

EVENTUALLY Rodriguez returned. He surveyed the silent occupants of the barracks with a boyish grin which he quickly converted into a grim, ironical smile and then called:

"Major Cartaya! Please send in another squad!"

Six more men entered, some of them seeming to have great difficulty in keeping serious faces. In four trips each, this squad removed the weapons of the prisoners from the racks down the center of the barracks and carried them away somewhere. The *soldados* themselves were then ordered to file slowly out the door. The change from the lighted interior to the outer darkness hindered their vision and made them uncertain of just where they were going, but a rifle muzzle in the ribs is a good antidote for curiosity.

A minute later they found themselves all herded into a corner of the empty corral just outside the barracks wall. Their cursing and incoherently furious officers were there before them, having been routed from sleep, led to the corral and securely bound during the interval when Rodriguez had been absent from the long main room of the barracks.

There was a short pause, a general air of waiting for something, and the smell of smoke came drifting on the night air. A crackling sound gradually became audible. The corral was so placed that the men therein could not actually see the barracks, but a red glow mounting into the sky told its own tale. A horseman galloped around into sight, shouted that General Rodriguez presented his compliments and would Lieutenant Coello please guard the prisoners until the main body had withdrawn, and galloped away again. The crackling of the flames increased to a roar, and dense clouds swirled down around the corral.

Some five minutes afterward there came a single shrill whistle. Half of the guards went and fetched the horses of the detachment; then they all mounted, wheeled and rode off at a gallop. The weaponless garrison rushed for the burning building, but the heat of the fire drove them impotently back, and they sat and watched the fire burn itself out and waited for the night to end.

Meanwhile a small body of horsemen rode swiftly away beneath the brilliant tropic stars. In addition to Rodriguez himself there had been exactly eighteen of the raiders.

The officers of the company of infantry, left without weapons or clothing after that night raid, were convinced that they had been overcome by a battalion and, to save their faces, swore it had been a regiment. The Montalvo government was at last definitely shaken from its security born of many years of practically unchallenged sway, and became seriously alarmed. The following weeks served to increase this alarm till it verged on panic.

THE swift raids of El Conquistador became famous throughout the land. Always he struck by night and was gone well before dawn, always he appeared at the place where he was least expected, and always he was successful and eluded all pursuit. Sometimes the raids were as bloodless as the one described above; other times there would be some sharp fighting—fighting in which surprized and panicky soldiers rushed from their barracks to find themselves clear targets in the light of fiercely flaming piles of oil-soaked brush and shot in vain at vague shapes or rifle flashes in the blackness.

The raids were all of minor importance from a tactical point of view. No great military post was stormed, no really great base of supplies wiped out. At the worst the riders of El Conquistador burned a few isolated barracks or ran off with a few mule loads of ammunition; it was the moral effect that counted. Rodriguez' band had been recruited a little above the original eighteen, but it was still so small that half its dependence was on bluff—bluff which was making a laughing stock of the military power of Montalvo.

Realizing that his inability to trap the elusive Conquistador was making him a nation-wide jest and that laughter is deadly to tyrants, Montalvo felt the need for something drastic. Three Secretaries of war were appointed and demoted in quick succession without bettering things. A dozen well-planned and tempting ambushes missed fire; El Conquistador was too well served by a system of espionage established long before to be trapped in that manner. Offers of large rewards for his capture were equally barren of results; none were in the full confidence of the little band of outlaws except Sinclair and Don Pedro Casteliero, and the scattered spies transmitted their information through obscure channels and could not have betrayed Rodriguez if they had wanted to.

Permanent strong patrols of Rurales were posted on the main roads leading to the Swamp of Shadows without result. Montalvo even had a few peons taken at random and secretly tortured somewhere in the depths of the fortress of La Fuerza, but they happened to be unfortunate innocents who knew no more than Montalvo himself. When the news of this last came to Juan Rodriguez he decided that the time was ripe for the final acts of the drama, and summoned David Sinclair to his lair in the hills.

"SO THERE you have it, Dave." Rodriguez was sitting astride a wood and cowhide chair in one of the tiny cabins hidden in the hills back of Las Lomas, and he lighted a cigaret as he finished a long explanation.

"So there you have it. That is your part. Do you think it will work?"

"It's a long chance."

"We believe in long chances."

"It ought to work, Juan, if you're sure you're ready."

"We are as ready as we can be. We have increased our force to the number we wanted. And the weather is right now, too. I have been waiting for the hurricane season, of course."

"Yes, I know."

"And there is another thing I wanted to wait for, too."

"What?"

Rodriguez grinned broadly.

"Uniforms, Dave, uniforms. You can't be taken seriously as a soldier in this country without a uniform. And the better outfit you have the greater man you are. We have some green and gold ones that will knock your eye out."

At dawn the next day one of the patrols of Rurales saw a single horseman ride out from the Swamp of Shadows. He rode a foam-flecked horse that went at a weary, lumbering gallop, and both man and beast were covered from head to foot with wet, black mud and bleeding from where branches and twigs had scratched them.

The man seemed to be an American beneath his coating of mud, and when he pulled up beside the patrol he told a tale that made the officer of Rurales commandeer a railroad engine and start for Baracoa City, the capital, with all speed. This American was the first outsider to have actually entered the swamp-screened lair of the rebels, and the officer knew how eagerly Montalvo would welcome him.

"Start at the beginning, señor," said Montalvo in his harsh voice. Sinclair had been brought straight to the presidential palace by his guide, and his mud-splashed riding clothes lent color to his story. He found Montalvo a flabby, sloppy man with an evil, colorless face and cruel eyes. He wore a soiled frock coat, buttoned close, with a large revolver making an ungainly bulge at the waistline.

"It was three days ago, señor Presidente, that I came to the village of Cabaiguan on a business trip. It was a beautiful night, though hot, and I saddled my horse to take a ride after dark and cool off. Cabaiguan is far from the Cienague de Sombras, and I never thought of the bandits till I was suddenly surrounded by armed men. I was bound and placed in the center of the troop, and we rode off."

"How many were there?"

"Two hundred men, more or less. We rode swiftly toward the swamp. My eyes were bandaged, and I could not tell the route we followed. Without doubt we slipped between two of your patrols. I understand they are quite far apart. From the feel of it we were sometimes on firm, but more often on soggy ground, several times our horses were fetlock deep in water, and twice their hoofs rang on the planking of bridges. Their hiding place is very deep in the Cienagua."

"Were you able to see anything of it?"

Montalvo was leaning forward eagerly, following every word.

"Quite a lot, as I was held prisoner there two days. There is a good bit of firm ground hidden in the center of the swamp, and they have built themselves a town there. Tents and thatched cabins arranged in streets, a guard house, even a flag pole. It is a full-fledged military encampment."

"What were they going to do with you?"

"I understand they intended to demand a ransom from the fruit company. Which reminds me, señor Presidente, that the fruit company will be very disturbed at this affront to one of its representatives. It is possible that the home office will take the matter up with the State Department in Washington."

Montalvo moved his head impatiently, as if to shake off disturbing thoughts. Wondering how the State Department would regard the growing unrest in Baracoa had given him more than one bad moment during the weeks past and spoiled his enjoyment of a good many quiet after dinner cigars.

"How did you escape?" he asked.

"I was confined in an ordinary thatched hut, with a guard outside the door. Early last night I managed to get rid of my bonds. Once my hands were free I easily tore a hole through the frail wall of the house and crawled out. I found a horse, and had just climbed on his back when somebody saw me and fired. I drove my heels into the horse and went off at a gallop, giving him his head."

"Could you find your way back?"

"I could not. It was pitch dark, and I was too busy dodging branches and creepers and trying to stay on the plunging, frightened horse to see where we were going. Just after dawn I came to the edge of the swamp and fell in with a patrol of Rurales. I have no idea how long I rode, nor in what direction."

"Did you get an idea how many men there are hidden in there?"

"I should say there are about a thousand of the rebels."

"Rebels!" Montalvo snorted angrily. "Bandits, you mean, señor. Renegades! *Canalla!* Could an army hunt them out?"

"I should think that if you sent a strong force to work its way slowly throughout the whole swamp it could find the place."

"Then I will send an expedition."

"If you want a word of advice, señor Presidente, I would send your best men. The outlaws are a desperate lot, and will have the advantage of fighting on known ground. I would send men you are sure of."

Montalvo rubbed his unshaven chin in some perplexity. He knew only too well just how little he could depend on the bulk of the army for real work.

"I might send a force of Rurales," he ventured.

"That would be the best thing. How many have you throughout the country?"

"Twelve hundred."

"Then I would send them and, in addition, about five hundred of the best among the regular army. Give them supplies for two weeks and let them start at one end of the swamps and go right through, and they should sweep them clear of all the outlaws."

Montalvo sat for a few minutes in silent thought, and then rose to his feet.

"I thank you for your information and advice, señor," he said. "I will discuss matters with my cabinet."

"You are more than welcome, señor Presidente," replied Sinclair suavely. "But it is only fair to tell you that I am going to take the matter up with the American consul at once. Men of our nation must not be in danger of such experiences."

Montalvo's pale face lost most of its oily cordiality. The American consul had on more than one occasion interfered in little pet schemes of his, and he had no love for that outspoken and disrespectful person.

TRUE to his word, Sinclair went at once to the consulate, told his story and made his request. The consul heard him through in silence, then fixed him with a rather skeptical blue eye and inquired—

"So you want me to put official pressure on Montalvo to do something toward putting an end to this—er—rebel band?"

"Exactly. You don't want Americans to be in danger of being abducted or killed, do you?"

The consul did not answer immediately, but stretched his bony frame out in his wicker chair and gazed at the ceiling with a faintly twisted smile.

"Yes, I guess old Montalvo is about due for a fall," he said softly.

Sinclair stared at him with startled eyes. The consul laughed.

"Don't mind me, *chico*," he said reassuringly. "I'm just an old bird that manages to guess a good many things." His tone grew more formal. "Very well, Mr. Sinclair, I shall call upon the president immediately and forcibly represent to him the extreme pain which our benevolent but stern government will feel when it learns of this affront to one of its citizens."

After which he grinned broadly and accompanied Sinclair to the door.

There was an executive session of the Montalvo cabinet that night which lasted nearly till dawn, and the next morning orders went out for all the Rurales in Baracoa to mobilize immediately at one of the towns near the Swamp of Shadows. Some of the more far-sighted members of the cabinet had opposed this move, pointing out the indisputable truth that the Rurales and the picked Federal troops he was sending in with them were the only forces on which Montalvo could really depend to any great degree.

The bulk of the army was poorly trained, ill paid, somewhat dissatisfied and almost certainly affected by the recent wave of anti-Montalvo feeling that had been sweeping the country. In the end Montalvo finally decided to send the punitive expedition, even though it would mean putting his best troops entirely beyond his reach for two weeks, and try to end the revolt at one blow.

Rodriguez had remarked to Sinclair about the weather. It was now September, and for the past few days it had been hurricane weather. Frequent rain squalls of short duration occurred throughout the day and gusty winds of slightly increasing intensity alternated with periods of cloudy calm. Everything pointed to the approach of a West Indies hurricane, and it arrived the day after the seventeen hundred Rurales and soldiers entered the confines of the great swamp. Its only effect, so far as they were concerned, was to make the going a little worse.

It was not much of a hurricane—not really more than a wind storm, but it did blow down a number of telegraph poles. And thus it served Rodriguez' purpose. He would have taken a chance and gone ahead without it, but it enabled him to cripple the country's telegraph system without the sudden stoppage of communications arousing any suspicion. His men scattered around the country for the purpose cut the wires in half a dozen places, not merely severing them but removing long sections and thus effectually preventing any prompt repairs. As soon as their task was done the men who had cut the wires rode at top speed for a certain rendezvous deep in the interior.

THE important army posts of Baracoa all lie near the railroad and extend across the country in more or less of a straight line from Baracoa City to Monte Verde amid the hills near the far border. The commander at Monte Verde, General Agramonte, was a bitter and a disappointed man. His post was the least desirable of all the army list, and it had fallen to him because of certain political indiscretions of his youth.

On the morning of the second day after the big wind General Agramonte was awakened strangely early by his orderly pounding on his door. The general invoked the deadly curse of the Seven Inconveniences upon the disturber of his rest and inquired the cause.

"The revolution is upon us, my General!" quavered the orderly's piping voice. "We are surrounded!"

"What revolution? Who surrounds us?" snapped the general, reaching for his boots and uncertain whether to throw them at the orderly and go back to sleep or put them on and get up. His ear caught the ragged notes of a bugle and the sound of many hasty footsteps from the direction of the barracks, and the boots went on his feet instead of at the orderly's head.

Slipping on his uniform over his pajamas and buckling on his pistol belt as he went, General Agramonte stepped out of his quarters and climbed quickly up the steps to the guardhouse roof where there was a sort of observation platform. He found the other officers of the regiment and a half that formed the garrison of Monte Verde there before him, looking equally blear-eyed and sleepy and equally hastily clothed.

"Where are these *canalla* of revolutionists?" he inquired as he reached the roof.

One of his subordinates pointed to the nearest of the many surrounding hills.

"They are without doubt under cover in the underbrush along the hill tops, waiting the order to attack. See how their officers spy us out."

On the hill he indicated stood a group of five men in bright green uniforms. Four of them studied Monte Verde barracks with field glasses, the other industriously waved the little colored flags of the wig-wag signal code. On most of the other surrounding hills stood small groups of the green-clad men, either waving signal flags or shouting orders to the well concealed forces behind. Mounted despatch riders were galloping from one hill to the next and a strong dismounted patrol was advancing down the bed of a small stream.

The garrison of Monte Verde was beginning to line up in front of the barracks when a group of mounted officers rode over the top of the central hill, accompanied by a trooper with a white flag. General Agramonte temporarily ceased wondering whether the antique cartridges in his soldiers' belts would fire at all, and descended from the guard house roof to meet the approaching group of officers.

The leader checked his horse a moment to order back the advancing patrol and then came on a little farther. He stopped his escort and came on foot to meet Agramonte so that the two of them met some distance out from the barracks and out of hearing of either the rebel escort or the general's subordinates. The general was unpleasantly conscious that he presented a very poor appearance beside the tall and slender young officer in the green and gold uniform.

"I am General Agramonte, in command here at Monte Verde."

The other bowed low.

"I am General Rodriguez, commander in chief of the armies of Baracoa."

So this was el Conquistador! Agramonte had suspected as much, and looked at him with keen interest.

"We have you surrounded, General. Four full regiments are sheltered behind the crests of those hills."

The general blinked uncomfortably. The other continued:

"It would only be useless slaughter for you to attempt to fight. Doubly useless as most of the remainder of the army has already sworn allegiance to me and is even now mobilizing for a march on Baracoa City."

"Are you offering us terms?" asked Agramonte, trying to put the question with an amused carelessness, as if he had no thought of capitulation and merely inquired out of curiosity.

"It is of that I would speak. I often heard my late father refer to you as a man of honor and a fine soldier."

Agramonte straightened his wrinkled tunic and swelled his chest with pride. He was more than surprized to learn that old Don Juan Rodriguez had thought so well of him, but he accepted it as his due.

"Ah yes," he said, "a fine man your father. I was often in his councils."

"It is in memory of my father that I offer you this chance. The late storm has downed all the wires and the other generals do not know that you are not of our number. I have kept it from them, hoping that you would join our force. It is for that reason that I have brought only my own men with me today, and even they believe that you are with us and that this demonstration is for the benefit of your subordinates."

"Then you mean—"

"I mean, General, that if you join with us now I will tell the other generals that you have been a supporter of mine almost from the beginning, and you will thus be saved from the unenviable position of a lone supporter of a lost cause."

Agramonte was capable of quick decisions upon occasion, and he made one now. He held out his hand.

"In the name of the ancient friendship I bore your father, I accept. You may consider me as with you heart and soul."

"And your subordinates?"

"Oh, them! Have no fear. I hold them in the hollow of my hand."

"Good. Then gather your troops and march on Baracoa City as soon as possible.

You will encounter other troops on the way, but I will tell every one that you have been in my confidence from the beginning."

"Do we not march together?"

"No, my troops are all mounted. Also it is best to strike quickly, as Montalvo's best men are now deep in the Cienagua de Sombras and cannot be reached. We will ride on while you and the rest of the infantry mobilize and follow."

WHILE the preceding conversation was taking place the garrison, standing at ease in front of the barracks, had stared in consuming curiosity. When they saw their commander link arms with the tall stranger and walk back to his horse with him, a gasp of surprize came simultaneously from the entire force. A whisper ran down the ranks that the stranger was el Conquistador. The general walked back to them with his chin up and a brisker stride than they had ever known him to use, while the green-clad horsemen trotted back up the slope of the hill. There was more waving of brightly colored flags, and then the rebel force began to withdraw.

For the most part the retirement was effected as unobtrusively as the advance had been, the high underbrush screening the departing troops as it had their presence. Only at one point between two of the hills could the garrison actually see much of the withdrawal, but there they saw considerable. A seemingly endless number of green-clad cavalry rode past that gap in the brush, well mounted cavalry with an occasional amunition or supply wagon.

"Seven hundred and fifty men behind that one hill," grunted a lieutenant who had been watching very closely. "The people must indeed be rising to give him so great a force."

While el Conquistador was withdrawing, General Agramonte summoned his officers into a hasty conference.

"*Compañeros,*" he began, "it is time that you knew our leader's plans. For a long time I have felt that our country needed a change of government, that the administration which keeps fine officers such as yourselves in a minor post like this all their days is not a good one."

The junior officers lost the attitude of tolerant derision with which they usually listened to the words of their chief and became interested.

"Unknown to you," continued the general, "I have for a long time been in the confidence of that military genius Juan Rodriguez, he whom most of you call el Conquistador. Many of his most daring raids have been made by my advice. By my influence most of the other high army officers have been brought to our standard. We are now gathering forces to march on Baracoa City. This demonstration was for your benefit, to show that business is meant. Any one who prefers the niggardly tyranny of Montalvo to the generous Conquistador is at liberty to remain behind. The rest march with me before the morning is over."

A few minutes later, with his officers unanimously won over, General Agramonte made a somewhat similar but slightly longer speech to the assembled garrison. He was surprized to see how promptly they threw their hats in the air and shouted:

"*Vive el Conquistador! Viva la Libertad!*"

The psychological tactics of the picturesque Conquistador had seized on the imaginations of the common soldiery long before this.

"*Bueno,* my children," said Agramonte when the cheering died down. "All the army is with us, and we gather for a march on our capital city to reestablish our ancient liberties. Make ready. El Conquistador has led the way and we follow within the hour."

Meanwhile Juan Rodriguez and his army were riding swiftly away from Monte Verde, so as to be out of sight before the garrison of that post got under way. There were exactly seventy-two horsemen and one wagon—twelve of Juan's original eighteen companions and the rest newer recruits, picked with great care. Six of those original eighteen men slept in lonely graves near the sites of various daring raids.

Twenty of the men had distributed themselves around on the different hilltops and posed as officers, while the remaining fifty-odd had simulated the rank and file, their main duty being during the withdrawal. They had ridden slowly past that carefully selected gap in the underbrush through which they were visible to the garrison of Monte Verde, and as each rank of four riders was safely past the gap they would turn quickly down the concealing back slope of the hill and hurry back to the starting point in time to ride by again. They had done this fifteen times, and every third or fourth time the lone baggage wagon had lumbered over the same route.

It was still early in the morning, and the rebel army pressed on toward Yucayo, the next army post, while behind them the insurgent garrison of Monte Verde tailed down the cart road in a long, dusty column, singing as they went. The revolution was at last afoot, moving toward the unsuspecting capital, while the only troops upon which the Montalvo administration could depend were painfully pushing deeper and ever deeper into a disease-filled mass of swamp and morass in search of a mythical robber city.

EARLY in the afternoon the vanguard of the revolution reached the vicinity of Yucayo. This was an isolated army post, similar to Monte Verde though somewhat smaller, and situated with an equal disregard of military principles in a valley in the hills.

The same general tactics were followed that had been used early in the day. The commander of this garrison proved equally appreciative of Rodriguez' generous action in offering to put him on the same status as all the other generals who had already joined the revolution. Rodriguez gave him to understand that if he chose to say that he had been in the confidence of el Conquistador from the beginning, he would never contradict him.

Rodriguez again pushed ahead, telling his latest ally to wait for the garrison of Monte Verde and follow along with them in the morning. The general had made a careful note of the shade of green that was used in the rebel uniform, and as soon as el Conquistador had gone, despatched a squad to search the nearest town for cloth of that color.

Rodriguez and his seventy-two men slept that night by the roadside a few miles out from Yucayo. The rest of the garrisoned posts were in flat cane country, and a change in method was necessary. Seventy-two men can not possibly simulate an army without hills to hide their fictitious ambushed forces.

Keeping a few miles ahead of the marching column formed by the combined garrisons of Monte Verde and Yucayo, Rodriguez and his staff of a dozen men rode boldly into the strongly garrisoned city of Santa Amalia, a white flag of truce flying at their head. The rest of his men circled the city. Ignoring the staring and uncertain sentries and scarcely noticing the dazed young lieutenant who came to meet him, el Conquistador demanded to see the *Commandante*. In a brief but decisive talk he informed the *Commandante* that his main body had circled the city and pushed on, but that there were enough troops following to storm Santa Amalia without difficulty. He led the startled *Commandante* to the *presidio* roof and showed him the approaching dust clouds, pointing carelessly to his own detachment waiting on the far side of the city as an advance patrol.

He then remembered that his father had also thought well of this officer and had made him a certain generous offer. The *Commandante* was deeply moved, and accepted at once, and so it was that when the combined columns marched into Santa Amalia the *Commandante* received the commanders patronizingly, saying that they had been so long in coming that el Conquistador and his staff had hurried on in the wake of the advance troops, leaving him in command.

This was a gigantic bluff, particularly since the *Commandante* had no doubt that the others had been in revolutionary councils for some time back. The somewhat peculiar circumstances enabled him to get away with it, and when the combined forces moved out toward Baracoa City after the heat of the day had passed, the *Commandante* of Santa Amalia rode at the head.

Continually growing in size, the rebel column rolled swiftly on toward the capital. Large numbers of sympathizers joined them as they marched, glad to fight under the banner of el Conquistador, now that he commanded an army. Rodriguez decided that he now had a large enough force at his disposal, and despatched a staff officer to tell the allied commanders to march on Baracoa City direct.

He himself had kept out of sight ahead, along with his fictitious advance troops. He spread out his riders as a thin screen to keep any Montalvo sympathizer from sending word of the rebel advance ahead to Baracoa City. Changing horses frequently, keeping continually on the move, sleeping in the saddle for an hour at a time, if at all, those few riders managed to keep any word from getting through. The rapidity of the advance aided them considerably.

If the commanders of the various units making up the following column had ever compared notes, the fact that none of them had actually seen more than a few of Rodriguez' original force might have aroused suspicion. As it was, each commander was so anxious to keep secret the fact that he had only joined the revolution at the last moment that there was no danger of any such occurrence.

The party of linemen sent out to repair the telegraph wires had been captured. Alarmed at the lack of reports from this party and the failure to reestablish communication with the rest of the country, Montalvo sent out a troop of cavalry to ride along the line of the telegraph and find out the cause of the delay. This troop of cavalry was seen by Rodriguez' patrolling riders and its presence reported to him. He ordered his men to keep out of sight and let the troop continue undisturbed toward the main column. As a result, they stumbled squarely into the head of the marching column, and there was a short and bloody skirmish from which only a few of the cavalry went galloping away.

Knowing that the time had arrived for the final stroke, el Conquistador took personal command. He said that he had despatched his own force to intercept the Rurales in case they returned from the swamp—though actually he was certain that there was no danger of this for at least a week—and that he had merely retained one troop of riders as his personal bodyguard. The allied generals were so thoroughly committed to him since the unexpected skirmish with the cavalry that they had to carry the thing through to the finish, and he knew that he could count on them in the attack on the city.

Exactly six days had elapsed since General Agramonte had awakened to find Monte Verde surrounded by the rebels, and now el Conquistador was within sixty miles of the capital with a large force at his disposal and the countryside declaring in his favor as he marched by.

It was the tactics of the past months that had made this possible—the picturesque if unimportant raids, siezing on the imagination of the young men and the subtle propaganda, gradually fixing the idea in everybody's mind that Montalvo's days were numbered. All the allied commanders had been surprized to see how promptly and enthusiastically their men fell in with the proposal to go over to the revolutionists, and wondered secretly and uncomfortably what might have happened if el Conquistador had not been so generous.

IN THE quiet and relatively cool hours just after dawn the streets of Baracoa City were disturbed by the irregular hoof beats of a wearily galloping horse. One or two shutters were opened, and startled citizens peered out, but the horseman had passed on toward the center of the city. The horse fell in a heap in the plaza in front of the presidential palace, and the dozing sentries were amazed to see a sergeant of cavalry stagger to his feet and run toward them. One of the sentries stopped him with leveled rifle, actuated more by curiosity than by a sense of duty.

"Que pasa?"

"El Conquistador marches on the city with thousands of men! Let me pass to warn the president."

Riding on captured railroad trains, the rebels had managed to reach the city on the very heels of the survivors of that ill-fated cavalry patrol. By the time Montalvo and the other residents of the presidential palace were awakened, the first train was entering the city limits. The trains ran straight into the station in the heart of the city, and as each regiment detrained it formed up in the street and then started on the double for the plaza and the palace.

Baracoa City was not any too heavily garrisoned at this time, the five hundred men that had accompanied the Rurales having been drawn from that city. Two troops of cavalry were quartered in the back part of the rambling old palace, but the rest of the garrison were stationed in the ancient fortress of La Fuerza, and the swift inrush of the troop trains cut the men in La Fuerza off from the palace. The *commandante* of the fortress tried to lead his inadequate forces to the aid of Montalvo, but was driven back within the walls hopelessly outnumbered.

The two hundred cavalry that were in the palace put up a stubborn defense, hoping for aid from the fortress, firing their carbines from window and balcony while their numbers were gradually lessened by the greatly superior fire of the rebels. As time went on and no aid came, and they heard the old Krupps at the fortress booming away steadily, they came to realize that La Fuerza was as hard pressed as they. The fact was that when Agramonte of Monte Verde led his men against the fortress he found himself reenforced by most of the able-bodied men of the city who had appeared from their houses with a variegated assortment of weapons. La Fuerza had been the locale of too many early morning performances by Montalvo's firing squads to be popular with the people.

Montalvo nervously watched the desperate defense of the palace from the grand staircase of the palace, cursing himself for having been tricked into sending his best troops on a wild goose chase into a place where they were beyond reach. With the realization that the fortress could not send aid to the palace, and that the latter could not hold out much longer, he slipped quietly away and went to his room

Montalvo abandoned the habitual presidential frock coat which he had hastily donned when summoned from sleep and put on an ordinary tan linen suit. A broad-brimmed hat was pulled down over his eyes. From a hidden wall safe he took out bundle after bundle. When he left his room he was even bulkier than usual around the middle, but he carried a fortune in large denomination bank notes.

A secret passage led from a room in the palace to the old post-office across the way, and it was Montalvo's intention to try to get away by the back door of the post-office. As he emerged from the darkness of the passageway into the sunlit stillness of the deserted post-office patio, he saw Rodriguez standing alone, silently waiting.

The two men looked at each other grimly, neither speaking for some time.

"I have been expecting you," said Rodriguez at last.

"How did you know of the passage?"

"You forget that I once had a father who was well acquainted with the palace and its secrets."

As Rodriguez spoke of his father the blood slowly ebbed from Montalvo's face, leaving it absolutely colorless. There was a deadliness about the other's manner that was chilling.

"What do you intend to do?" Montalvo was man enough to keep his old arrogant tone, though he felt that this was the end.

"I am going to give you something you never gave my father—a fair chance."

Rodriguez spoke with a cold loathing.

"How do you mean?"

"You wear a gun. Reach for it."

Rodriguez was standing with his legs wide apart and his hands hanging loosely at his sides. Suddenly making his decision, Montalvo reached for the heavy revolver that nestled in the open holster at his belt, but the muzzle caught a little as he drew. El Conquistador's bullet struck him squarely in the heart, and at the same moment a burst of cheering announced that the palace had fallen.

When La Fuerza had surrendered, a hasty conference was summoned in one of the rooms of the palace. Rodriguez' staff, a number of prominent sympathisers such as Sinclair and Don Pedro Casteliero, and the generals of the assorted army were present.

"Señores," Rodriguez addressed them, "it is my intention to proclaim a military dictatorship to last until a general election can be held and the will of the people really determined—a thing sometimes burlesqued, but never really done while Montalvo was in power.

"We have accomplished our first end with comparatively little bloodshed. Now it is our task to readjust things as quickly as possible. You will remember that in all our conferences I spoke of the need for such a readjustment."

He glanced around the table as he said this, and his hearers nodded. Agramonte and the other generals nodded with particular vigor to show how well they remembered all those councils. Rodriguez turned to them.

"Montalvo had much of the money he had stolen from the treasury on him, and we are tracing the rest. Before night your soldiers will have been paid all the back wages due them. Then start them on the return to their posts at once. Let them spend their money after they get back.

"Send the men back under your seconds in command, who are hereby promoted one grade. Yourselves I need here in the capital as an advisory board."

It is interesting to know that although this advisory board functioned with more or less efficiency for many years, not one of its members ever revealed the manner of his joining the revolt.

SOME days later the punitive expedition sent out by Montalvo emerged from the Cienagua de Sombras, having fought its painful way through the entire area of the swamps. The colonel of Rurales in command halted his haggard, mud-caked, insect-tortured, fever-ridden men on the first patch of firm ground beyond the swamp edge and gave the order to stack arms and fall out.

Within five minutes the entire command was sound asleep, enjoying the first real rest since they had entered those unhealthy morasses two long weeks ago.

They slept the deep sleep of exhausted men, laying motionless in strange, sprawling attitudes. The colonel noticed that the hastily posted sentries slept with the rest, and lacked the heart to awaken them.

A small cavalry patrol in strange green and gold uniforms came trotting down the road. The lieutenant in command handed the colonel of Rurales an official order.

As he read the first paragraph the colonel's worn face creased into a smile. A month's leave for his entire force was the best of news. Then his eye fell on the signature:

By order of President Rodriguez
Casteliera, Chief of Staff.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

The lieutenant told him.

"And Presidente Montalvo?" inquired the colonel.

Montalvo had treated the Rurales well, and they were loyal to him.

"He was killed while trying to escape with stolen treasury funds."

The colonel considered, fighting against the heart-breaking weariness that nearly drove everything from his brain except the thought of how pleasant it would be to stretch out on the green, dry grass. Grass, dry grass, after endless days and nights of soggy, unhealthy moss! With a jerk he straightened up his head again.

The colonel was loyal to Montalvo, but Montalvo was dead. He would have fought for a lost cause, but there seemed to be no cause to fight for. Suddenly he smiled again.

"Present my respects to the president," he said, "and our thanks for the month's leave."

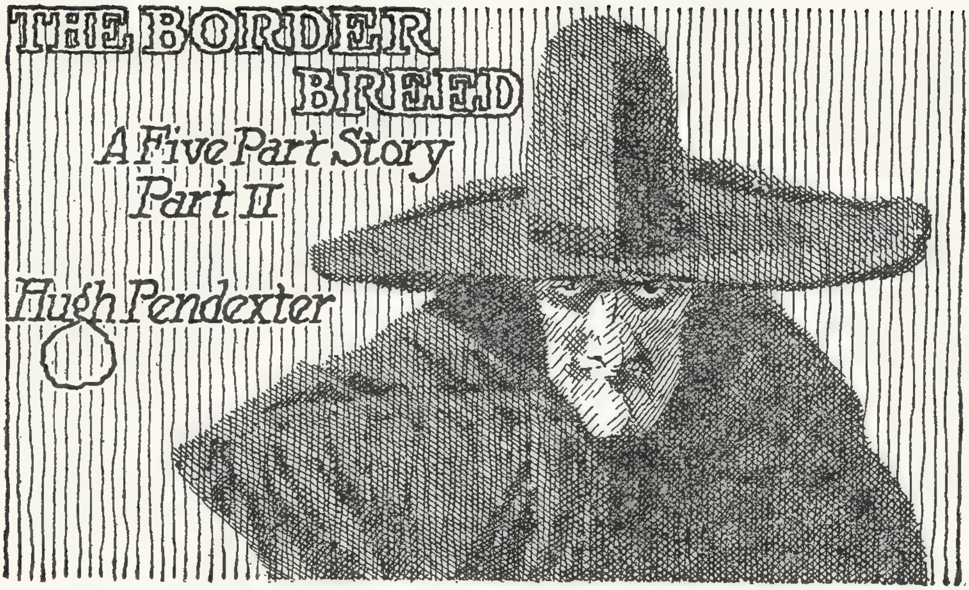
And as he turned thankfully toward that patch of grass he added dreamily:

"And tell him that if he shows as much genius in government as he did in not hiding in that unholy swamp, he will be a very great statesman."

THE BORDER BREED

A Five Part Story Part II

Hugh Pendexter



Author of "The Homesteaders," "Pards," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

I WAS born and raised in Tennessee. My earliest recollection is that of a comfortable log cabin at McBee's Ferry, on the Holston. My father, Jeffry Lang, I knew but little, for he was much away, engaged in trade in the Chickasaw country, and he died in my fifth year. Soon afterward we moved to Knoxville, founded three years before. This town held splendid associations for me—its massive blockhouse, the sturdy stockade, the unbelievable (at that time) splendor of the Governor's mansion. This was a fitting locale for the hair-raising recitals of the massacre at Cavet's Station in 1793.

Here I gained my first knowledge of the written word. Noah Webster's "Reader," the first book of its kind published on this side of the Atlantic, "Pilgrim's Progress," and DeFoe's endlessly diverting "Robinson Crusoe" composed my meager but satisfying library.

The stirring tales told by the travelers back from the West early fired my quick imagination and roused my latent wanderlust. At my first opportunity I hired out as assistant to a carter traveling to North Carolina. My premier passage through the lofty Cumberlands was largely disappointing, for we met nothing more exciting than a few wandering Cherokees in search of wild-grapes. On my return from this trip I found that my mother had married Joel Snow, a rough but extremely fine type of frontiersman.

A close friendship grew up between my step-father and myself, and he taught me much about woodsmanship and marksmanship. Not long afterward my mother died, and Joel and I took to wandering toward the Mississippi, along whose mighty banks land was reputed to be exceptionally rich and fertile. It was Joel's idea to buy up land so that I might grow up to be a gentleman of leisure, as was befitting a youngster of my propensities and learning, the latter of which he, in his naïvete, stood greatly in awe of.

One day a strange morbidity clouded the usual geniality of my step-father. I wonderd at the change in him—at the hunted look in his eye—but he refused to unburden himself because he wished to spare me all anxiety. He began to send me ahead on our journey "to scout a bit" and made me read every word of any paper he could lay his hands on.

At my importunate questioning Joel finally told me the cause of his uneasiness. He had once testified against The Dancer, one of a notorious band of border mauraders known as Harpe's gang. The Dancer was said to have died in prison, but in reality he had escaped, and even now was stalking Joel for revenge. And since The Dancer never attacked except from behind and was one of the most treacherous of cutthroats, Joel feared him with cause enough.

So we began to travel stealthily by night, making our way toward Kentucky and the beautiful Ohio, where we knew The Dancer would not dare to follow, for there his reputation was too well known. Near Harrodsberg we fell in with Bully McGin and his impetuous daughter. McGin inveigled Joel to take part in Aaron Burr's wild scheme to seize Mexico from Spain—a plot promising untold wealth if successfully turned. I was left much in the company of "Princess" Polly McGin, who took a violent dislike to me from the first. On her dare we flatboated to Shipping Port to try my marksmanship in a shooting contest, during which I unintentionally angered a drunken boatman, who promised to thrash me as soon as the contest was over.

"The Border Breed," copyright, 1925, by Hugh Pendexter.

FEW people of later years understand how valuable to the United States were those early shooting-matches. From western Pennsylvania and Virginia, as far west as lands were cleared and cabins were built, shooting-matches were favorite amusements. A good shot would be a good provider. A sensible border girl would not marry a man who could not handle a gun effectively. Morgan's rifle-men were redoubtable in such contests before being called upon to shoot their way through hostile armies. Successful leaders in forays against the Indians had learned the rifle while endeavoring to drive center on such targets we were shooting at. In Tennessee shooting-matches were an institution; and men from New England, I learned, were just as keenly addicted to the sport. When our young men were called on to go to war they did not need to learn how to shoot. Regardless of how awkward they might appear at learning the manual of arms, they were deadly when the actual fighting commenced.

The next target brought from the tree was well shot, but not so good as Wood's. Three more men took their turn without bettering Wood's score before the small man nodded for me to step to the mark.

I advanced and did what none had done; I remained standing while firing my string. My rifle was an excellent piece of work of a Tennessee gunsmith and I was well used to it from the day Joel brought it home to me. Nor had the powder and lead I had used in practise outside of Nashville been wasted. As a hunter I satisfied Joel.

Measuring carefully the powder in my "charger," the tip of a deer's antler, I took my time in loading. I examined the flint to make sure it was not dull and smooth and needed to be picked. I was particular in selecting a bullet from the pouch that was most round and smooth. I was very particular in selecting from my "patching." I knew I must shoot my best if I would defeat Wood.

While I took my time in loading I fired quickly, once I had the gun at my shoulder; for in this style of quick sighting had I drilled myself. When my target was fetched from the tree it showed the two arms obliterated, while all the other shots were so closely lodged as to make an inch-wide hole. I felt a mighty glow of exultation. Polly McGin seized my arm and pressed it with surprizing strength.

"I knew it! You've won!" she exclaimed.

The small man and two woodsmen retired to one side to compare the two targets. I was disappointed, and surprized, when the small man reported Wood and I must shoot off a tie.

Polly McGin was outraged by this decision and scolded viciously. The small man at last rebelled and declared—

"If your pa was here now, Polly McGin, and ready to cut my throat, I'd hold to it the two men have tied each other."

None of the others equalled Wood's and my targets, and there followed much talk as to how many shots should be fired to break the tie. It was finally agreed we should have three shots apiece. Two fresh targets were brought forward. Wood insisted I should shoot first. All the men except those around the keg ran close to the target and lined up along the narrow lane my lead would travel. Polly McGin kept well back from me as I took my position.

Patiently loading and quickly aiming and firing, I cut the left arm close to the center with the first shot. Polly cheered loudly as the result was shouted back to us. With the second shot there was more and louder shouting. When it subsided the small man yelled:

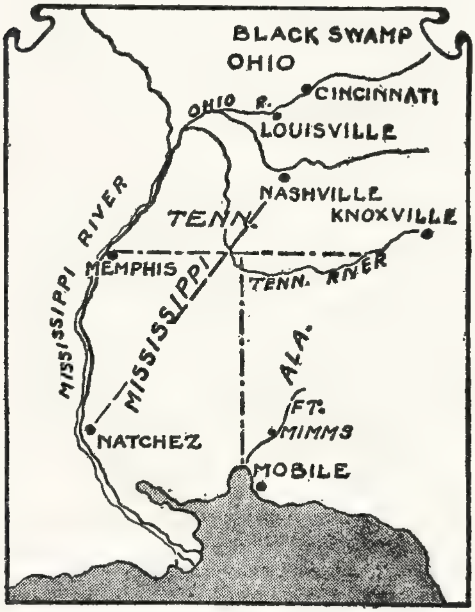
"Drove it plumb center!"

My third shot was practically as good as the first. I walked over near the target and watched for the lead to strike. My rival, stretched out on the ground, was painfully slow in sighting. His first shot brought a rousing cheer, for it drove center. After several minutes he fired again and clipped an arm from the cross. I believed I was beaten. The third shot was followed by a loud oath, and I glanced back and beheld Wood on his feet. Before I could shift my gaze to the target the little man was exclaiming:

"Six inches to one side! What's the matter with you, Nate?"

"It was this —— tree!" cried Wood hoarsely. "Bit of bark fell on my neck just as I was pulling trigger! That gives the young'un the hide'n taller. I take the heaviest hind-quarter. That is—unless he wants to shoot his share against mine."

My share was considered the most valuable, but I did not relish the idea of carrying it two miles to sell it. I readily accepted the offer. With his nerves still shaken by his misfortune, he failed to equal either of his former records and I won handily. I now owned two-fifths of the cow. I challenged the man who stood third in the score to shoot the remaining hind-quarter against what I had won from Wood. He accepted and I won. Then in turn I shot against the fourth and fifth men, those who had won the heaviest fore-quarter, and defeated both, and stood the owner of the cow. I readily sold it back to the promoter for twelve dollars.



As I completed the trade, Polly McGin, her eyes shining, told me—

"You can shoot, Jeffry."

"I think he had me beat in the tie-off if the bit of bark hadn't hit his neck and made him jump."

She smiled widely, and reminded:

"To keep his nerves steady was part of the match. He ran that risk when he lay down under the tree. Now you lick that boatman and we'll walk to town and find some books."

I regretted her careless speech, as I had hoped Shank would have worked out from his fighting mood by this time. I resented the clear, carrying tone with which she spoke. Others heard, and my disgruntled rival began bawling:

"Shooting's over! Fetch along your fighting-man. Young 'un's ready for him." And with disturbing celerity the woodsmen formed in a wide circle, with Polly and me in the center.

I had no stomach for fighting the quarrelsome Shank; and I did not have the face to run away. There were no rules to govern such contests, and the victor could maim and wound his victim to his heart's content. And there had been nothing to stir my blood to the fighting pitch. The whole proceeding impressed me as being cruelly senseless.

Bentley, still chagrined at losing his wager on Shank, lounged up, wearing a grim smile of anticipation. This sight of him started my anger to rise. Aside from his lost wager, he was a boatman and would have no regrets at seeing me viciously mauled about by another boatman. My slowly aroused anger mounted higher as the men left the keg and whooping loudly, came to join the circle. Some of them leaped high as they ran in an exuberance of animal spirits; and none leaped so high and so wide, or moved so nimbly as did Shank.

"He's bad customer, young feller," maliciously warned Bentley.

"HE'LL need all his badness, but it won't serve him," I boasted as I began peeling off my hunting and under shirt. Then to the girl in an undertone I said— "Go up the bank and wait."

Her blue eyes opened widely in amazement.

"Leave you without a friend?" she rebuked. "Besides, it ought to be a proper fight."

I made no reply but sullenly gave all my attention to my opponent. He was laughing and saying something in an undertone that caused much merriment. One of the rivermen urged:

"Don't spend time fooling. Make a quick job of it. We oughter be back to the boat."

"Inside of five minutes I'll have him looking like what he oughter," promised Shank.

"He's master sure of besting you, young feller," murmured Bentley.

"It'll take something more than talk," I muttered.

"Hi, Shank! Hear that. Young feller says you've got to do something more'n talk if you finish the job in five minutes," cried Bentley.

Shank ceased his bragging and stared at

me malevolently. Then he pointed at me and laughed loudly and exclaimed—

"Stripped to the hide." Nor did he bother to discard any of his garments.

Polly McGin, holding my rifle, sat cross-legged in the circle, and appeared to be in excellent spirits. I was desperately angry with her, with Bentley, with Shank, with all of them. As I swept my gaze around the circle of grinning faces I felt more incensed; and the dearest wish I could entertain was to disappoint their expectations. This overwhelming desire to upset their calculations surged through me violently, and I was glad the waiting was over and to see Shank swaggering toward me, his curved fingers reaching out to claw or grab, a vicious grin revealing the loss of several front teeth as the result of some former brawl.

I walked to meet him so that the encounter would begin in the center of the circle and not close to the spectators. And my advance was like that of one who approaches a friend to exchange greetings; and there was flashing through my mind the picture of two stout carters, fighting outside the sign of General Washington at Nashville, and belaboring each other with their fists instead of fighting rough and tumble. That style of fighting had appealed to us boys in Nashville as being less dangerous and fully as exciting as gouging and biting and bone-breaking.

When all but within reach of his eager hands I suddenly halted and stepped back.

"He's changed his mind!" roared Bentley.

Shank advanced slowly, leering at me with his mouth twisted to one side. He glanced about to see the nearest point in the circle toward which he could drive me and catch me.

"Make the ring solid!" he cried.

Over his shoulder I saw the men willingly clasp hands so there would be no escaping from the circle. I stepped forward, my hands hanging at my side, and as he reached to seize me I stepped back. With an oath he jumped forward to seize me, but instead of retreating I stepped one side and met him half way with every ounce of my strength behind the fist I drove into his face.

He reeled back, his lips split and the blood gushing from his nose, and his animal cries of rage and pain told me I had hurt him.

"Maul him, Jeffry! Maul him!" screamed Polly McGin.

Shank rubbed some of the blood from his face and glared at me murderously. The battle had commenced: I must defeat him or live out my years a physical wreck.

I waited for him to come on. He glanced about and hoarsely ordered—

"Make that —— ring smaller. This ain't going to be any foot-race."

His friends cheered him and started to advance. Polly McGin leaped to her feet and swept the rifle about and screamed, "Fall back! Widen the ring!" And as the muzzle of my gun traveled around the circle, the men quickly gave ground. Then she confidently told me:

"Maul him, Jeffry. We must be back a-buying books."

By this time I was reconciled to meeting the unwholesome task before me. Shank was a good ten years older than I, and much heavier. He was a veteran in such encounters. But I was beginning to doubt if he ever fought except at hand grips and in a bestially cruel style. From the time I saw the carters fight, one being knocked senseless, I had believed theirs was the better way to settle an argument. The better man proved himself; the conquered lost neither ear, eye, nor nose. My only chance was to keep out of his clutches. To accomplish this evasion I ceased retreating for the moment and glided toward him.

He leaped forward and I dodged clear. This maneuver was repeated several times, or until his crazy rage got the better of him. He ducked his head and charged blindly like a bull, his arms flung wide, each finger a deadly hook. When he was all but upon me, and Polly McGin was squealing with alarm, I stepped from his path and caught him a smashing blow on the side of the head that should have left him as still and senseless as a similar blow had left the carter. The impact of my fist nearly broke my hand. Shank reeled sidewise with staggering steps; then shook his head to clear it.

If that blow would not knock a man down I had none that would. My heart sank. I knew he would doggedly stick at it until he had got me in his hands.

As distinctly as if he had been an onlooker I heard Joel's calm voice saying—

"Remember, Jeffry; we ain't scared of nothing that walks on legs if we can only see it."

Before I realized my purpose I was after my man before he could entirely recover.

I landed a blow between his eyes, and one on his ear, but his head was tough as oak. In my eagerness to finish it I all but snared myself. One of his groping hands caught my long hair. More by luck than design I caught hold of his little finger before his other hand could grip me. To save the digit from being broken he released his hold and snatched his hand away.

For a moment we stood facing each other; he was glaring murder and my gaze held nothing better. I heard Polly McGin crying:

"His head's too hard, Jeffry. Hit him over the heart!"

Some of the men laughed at this advice; for Shank's barrel of a chest looked to be proof against the kick of a mule. Shank walked after me slowly, driven by his deadly purpose. I gave ground readily, but now my fear was vanquished by desperation. And Joel's words were still in my ears. It suddenly became a fact in my mind that none of my people were afraid of anything that walked on legs, if it could be faced, even though it wore the grinning visage of death. And although I slowly retreated, moving in a circle to keep away from the onlookers and their clasped hands, my heart ceased its tumultuous beating.

The mood of the spectators began to change. They were disappointed by the way the battle had progressed. They ceased laughing and taunting and displayed cold rage. Some derided me for retreating. Others wrathfully insisted I stand up "like a man."

By the time I had backed half way around the circle the cries of the men began to have effect on Shank. Beneath his rage perhaps he believed he was being wronged by my tactics. His eyes half closed and his jaws clamped together tightly; and I knew he was about to rush me again. I stepped to my left as I fell back. Three times I did this and changed my course until we were moving along the diameter of the circle, with plenty of room on each side.

With a baring of his few teeth he leaped forward and tried to run me down. This time I ducked aside to the right and struck with my left with all my might at his body. I felt my fist sink into the flesh and knew I had missed his ribs. I felt his hand seize my wrist and realized that at last he was grappling with me. I threw up my right arm under his chin to keep him off. To my amazement there was no longer any wild creature in my path; and the way was clear for me, as it had been for that very moral man, Christian, when he thought a lion was facing him.

I could scarcely credit my eyes as he crumpled down to the ground, his hands raking the length of my body and legs. I leaped clear, thinking it was some trick.

"Hurrah for the Langs!" screamed Polly, dancing excitedly into the ring. "By ——! You've licked the varmint, Jeffry!"

The reaction must have left me faint. The voices of the men as they gathered around the prostrate man and called on him to get up and resume the fight came to me from a great distance. Polly brought my two shirts and was patting my shoulder and saying something about hurrying, and books, and that it was a noble fight, while I stood and waited for Shank to recover his senses.

BENTLEY, who had been kneeling by the inanimate figure, stood up and quietly told me—

"You mastered him, young Mister. But the boys don't 'low it was a fair fight, as he never fights the way you did. I'd be scooting away from here if I was you."

Again I could hear Joel talking to me. I hotly replied:

"I don't run from anything that walks on legs. If he has any friends here who want to take it up I'll rest for a few minutes and we'll go at it."

"Hurrah for the Langs! We'll lick the whole —— tribe, Jeffry!" cried Polly McGin.

"You hush your swearing! What would your father say?" I scolded.

Her small face flushed; then she became very grave.

"Don't tell him. He doesn't like it. But I've heard much rough talk, and when I get excited I forget. But you fought most proper, Jeffry Lang. You gave him the mauling he needed. When you get older and are married, your woman will have some one to stand up for her. Put on your clothes. We'll go home."

So we retired from the scene and took to the river path; and now that the ordeal was over I felt strangely weak and in no mood for talk. I scarcely heeded my companion as she babbled delightedly over my double victory. The marvel of a strong man succumbing to a blow in the pit of the stomach was engaging my thoughts.

"—always gets them," she concluded some sentence. "So, never break your hands on their hard heads. And if you ever do come to grips and can't break loose, drive your fingers over the edge of the hip bone. There's a nerve down in there somewheres, if you find it, that will take all the fight out of them."

"You dragged me into that fight," I suddenly accused her and stared somberly down on the dancing red head.

She was in front of me, facing me and blocking the path. And there was resentment in her blue eyes as she replied:

"Couldn't you see you dragged yourself into it by being neither backwoodsman nor boatman? Just a stranger. Couldn't you see they was bound to pick a quarrel with you the minute you got there? Bentley was mad by the way you boarded the boat. The boatmen were in liquor and up to mischief with any stranger. Bentley was doubly mad after you made him lose two dollars. I could have told you what was likely to happen before you landed at Shipping Port."

"You asked me to go down the river, knowing I would get into a fight?"

"I thought a fight would be most likely," she coolly answered. "But now you can come down this far, and much farther, as often as you will, and they'll treat you civil. Men will hear of the fight way down to Natchez and New Orleans. And the man who's whipped Shank won't be picked on, or shoved around. No one's scared of you, but they know you've proved yourself. So I have helped you after all."

"Helped me to get into a fight I might have avoided," I persisted. "I came to shoot for a beef, not to fight."

She fell into a strange mood of chuckling and resumed walking, now going ahead of me. She continued to be intensely amused at something until we were on the edge of Louisville. I halted and insisted she explain her exasperating behavior.

"It's about the man they called Nate Wood," she finally said. "And the bit of bark dropping on his neck and disturbing his aim."

"I see nothing funny in that. It was his bad luck. You yourself said he invited it lying on the ground under the tree. Served him right for shooting from that position, with a rest for his gun."

"But you'd done the same, only you believed you could shoot better standing."

"Even so. What is there to laugh about?"

"Not much, Old Sober Face," she replied. Then with her hands on her hips and tears blurring her blue eyes she was laughing harder than ever. I remained silent, coldly waiting for her to recover.

"It'll be the death of me!" she finally managed to sob out.

"We're in town. Folks will be looking at you and be thinking you're a silly child," I warned.

"They'll look politely enough when they see I'm Bully McGin's girl," she reminded. Then she was off again, laughing inordinately.

"All right, Polly. But tell me the joke. Then I'll laugh with you, and we'll be finding some books," I surrendered.

Wiping her eyes she explained:

"It's that bit of bark that hit Nate Wood's neck. He thinks it fell from the tree. I saw he was shooting too good and tossed it on his neck—"

CHAPTER IV

THE BREATHING SPELL

EXISTENCE at the cabin was streaked with storm and sunshine. Margy, when she pleased, could put the girl in her place by threatening to speak to her father. As a rule, however, unless Polly was about to do something her father would disapprove of, she was allowed much indulgence in her tantrums. Never able to foresee a storm-period, I believed I was daily in the girl's bad books. It resulted that I took to leaving the cabin in the morning and remaining away until night.

After several days of this isolation she followed me to town and asked—

"Why didn't you want me to go with you, Jeffry?"

At a short distance I scarcely would have recognized her. She had put on skirts and wore her red hair in a peculiar fashion, set off with a big comb secured in the Spanish trade. She was so prim and precise in appearance that I felt rather in awe of her, quite like a small pattern of a grand dame.

Quite abashed, and wishing her back in trousers so I might talk plainly to her, I answered—

"I had an idea you liked to be alone, Polly."

"It's a poor dog that's not worth whistling for," she rebuked.

"You like to quarrel too much," I frankly told her, and braced myself for her retort.

She civilly said—

"I miss my father. Don't stay away again all day."

It was not clear to me why she should make herself disagreeable because she missed her father. But as she looked rather forlorn, a bit repentant, and very sweet and dainty as she was turning away, I detained her, saying:

"Where are you going? You're here with your best clothes on. You might as well walk around the shops with me."

"I never ask myself to go anywhere with any one," she coldly replied. And away she went.

For the first time since meeting the girl I found myself feeling a trifle guilty. Her father had left her, in a way, in my care. In many ways she was younger than her years. Her upbringing had made her willful. She was used to having folks stand aside and give her the inside of the walk. She had traveled much and seen much; yet her training had ill fitted her to endure the bruises and jostlings the world would give her once her father was not towering above her, his fiery temper and long sword enforcing exaggerated respect.

I watched her out of sight and wished more peace could come to her. Then I spent what was left of my shooting money on "Paradise Lost," of which I knew nothing except that it was poetry, and Smollett's translation of "Don Quixote."

After a while I returned to the cabin and without a word offered her the books, with no idea whether she would accept or refuse them. And surely, if shining eyes and a gentle smile were any compensation, I was richly repaid. She hugged them as a child tightly holds a doll, and confessed:

"I was wicked, Jeffry, to think you'd run away from me. You wanted to be alone so's to buy these and surprize me. But I dressed up to please you, and I thought you weren't glad to see me. And it hurt."

We were very amiable, much to Margy's surprize, and after the noon meal we went outside and took turns reading aloud. I did not care much for the Milton book, but she rolled forth the sentences with huge enjoyment. "Quixote," however, delighted both of us. After we had finished the day's reading she told me:

"That would be a good name for you—Quixote. Only you must never fight again, except to help the weak. Your wring with the boatman was selfish. It helped no one and only pleased your love for fighting."

There was my resolve; I said nothing. She continued her theme, lecturing me on the evils of senseless brawls until I found my resolution weakening. In the midst of a recital of qualities found in the true gentleman, she suddenly broke off, screamed shrilly. Then she was off, running down the river bank, her big comb on the ground and her red hair bouncing up and down. When I recognized the tall figure of Bully McGin, with Joel and a stranger walking behind him, I was as eager as she to greet the home-comers.

Joel clamped both hands on my shoulders and declared—

"You've grown much older."

McGin, with the girl under his left arm, thumped me stoutly on the shoulder and bellowed—

"Takes the Princess to make a man show his age. How's he behaved, Princess?"

"He won a beef at a shooting-match down river and had a fight with Shank, the boatman."

McGin scrutinized me sharply and slowly remarked:

"So? But I see no signs of Shank's work. What was it about?"

"He wanted to fight. Shank wanted to fight. He licked Shank in a masterly manner."

"Joel, we have a rare story waiting for us. If Jeffry bettered Shank he has done well," cried McGin. "After supper we'll have it all. But I'm forgetting our guest. You young folks know Greenberry Spiller of Virginia. Traveled with us from Tennessee." This was my first inkling where Joel had journeyed.

We shook hands with the old man, for his long white beard and white hair testified to many years. But as I did this I was looking accusingly at Joel. The moment I could speak to him alone I asked—

"Why did you go there? Why didn't you take me?"

"McGin was keen to go. Had to leave you to look after the girl and Margy," he defended. "But this fighting of yours? You know how I feel about never being scared of anything that walks on legs; but you got into a foolish wring."

I shook my head, and insisted:

"What did you do in Tennessee? What part did you go to?"

"To Knoxville. Sold all my belongings. I bargained for an honest couple to live in your house and use the furnishings till such a time as you might want it. Haynes of the General Washington spoke highly of them. They'll pay the rent to him to hold for you. But I sold out, lock, stock and barrel."

"You'll never go back to Tennessee to live?" I whispered, and feeling strangely homesick.

"That depends." And I knew he meant he would never go back until convinced Dancer was dead.

Greenberry Spiller, walking behind us and perhaps feeling himself neglected, querulously called out:

"I say again that you folks are simple to stay down here on this side the river to be smothered by armies of movers flocking in. Look at them!" And he was pointing to the procession of flats coming down the long reach, with always others appearing around the bend. And it did seem as if the whole world were on the move and the Ohio was the only water-road.

Spiller eagerly continued—

"I say again that if you'd only go with me to that fair land in northern Ohio you'd find what the Psalmist had in mind when he sang about Paradise."

"He's been raving about the north country ever since we fell in with him," murmured Joel. "He's going to take land up there."

"Most bountiful harvest you ever see from just a handful of seed," the old man droned on, as if repeating something he had told many times. "A land of milk and honey. Wide, sweet meaders and a soil so fat and deep that one planting will bust all your corn-cribs when you try to put it under cover."

"Must be a fine stretch of land," whispered Joel. "He seems to know all about it. Got so I feel I'd like to look it over."

"And get killed by this Indian mischief-maker, Tecumseh," I warned. "Already settlers are crossing to our side of the river. White folks have been killed at the head of the Miami."

Spiller indignantly insisted:

"If whites was killed they was drunken, thieving traders, who cheated the Indians. Tecumseh, the Shawnee, would take my hand in friendship. And the land I have in mind, between Sandusky Bay and the Miami, ain't visited by Indians hardly any. Just a hunter now and then."

Plump Margy came forth, her thin, bell-like voice welcoming McGin and Joel, and she quickly made Greenberry Spiller feel like one of the family. Spiller ate with us and did much of the talking in his continuous praise of the northern Ohio country. McGin was respectful but not interested. At times he glanced at Joel sharply, and I believed my stepfather was deeply impressed by the old man's colorful description. After Spiller returned to the town to sleep McGin said:

"Wild lands up north are all right for those who want them. But there are richer prizes to be had without freezing to death."

This referred to the Mexican scheme and more might have been said had not Polly began her story of my fight with the boatman. The details of the actual combat were correct and revealed her keen powers of observation. She scarcely overlooked a move that either Shank or I had made. But she never hinted that she had been instrumental in starting the trouble.

McGin was loud in his praise and vowed he would have sliced off Shank's ears if I had lost the fight. But Joel was troubled and anxiously said—

"I hope, Jeffy, you ain't growing up to go around hankering for trouble?"

"I seek no trouble with any man" I assured him, and with an accusing glance at Polly, now perched on her father's knee.

"But you did fight, and with a stranger," she persisted.

If she could be as shameless as that in her recollections of the true facts, I was prohibited from telling them. Her father enthusiastically demanded—

"Why shouldn't he fight? And of course with a stranger. A man can't fight with a friend. Don't turn preacher, Polly. Leave that for Spiller. He's a rare one at preaching. Jeffry meets a boatman who feels wolfish around his shoulders, and he takes his measure. That's as it should be. Shows he's a lad of proper spirit."

Polly hid her face against his breast and I knew she was laughing at me. Yet she was most generous in her speech when she displayed her books and told how I had bought them with my "shooting-money." McGin beamed on me most amiably and declared—

"Reckless, but free with his hard money! That's the kind I like. By——! Jeffry, I like you more'n more."

AFTER we retired I asked Joel his plans; for I felt that our period of inaction should end. We were paying our way at the cabin, but we should have a big cabin of our own.

In a low whisper he told me:

"McGin wants me to try my hand at piloting. He thinks I'd make a proper pilot for the falls. If not for the Injun scare, which don't amount to much, I might travel north and look over that chunk of country Greenberry Spiller tells so much about. We're comfortably well off, now I've turned my property into cash. But if I try piloting what'll you do? Learn the river along with me?"

I briefly explained that, while I would gladly make a trip to Louisiana, I had no hankering to run a boat down to Shipping Port and then walk back two miles to do the same thing over again.

"Why not go to St. Louis and engage in trade?" I asked.

His voice sounded mysterious even in whispers as he told me—

"McGin and I are waiting for something big to happen. We want to be on the Ohio when it starts so we can catch hold and help the good work along."

From the other side of the room came the deep breathing of McGin.

"Burr and that Mexico business," I said.

"Well, if Aaron Burr gets the proper backing across the water there'll be rare prizes for them who take Mexico away from Spain. We don't owe nothing to Spain except trouble and worry. When I was your age Spain was stirring up the southern Indians against the Carolina settlements. For five years Jack Sevier held the path against them. So far as Spain goes, I'd like to cut down her holdings in America."

"She may lose Mexico, but if she does it won't be because of anything Burr does," I insisted.

"Now, Jeffy, you talk like a child. How can you know that? Your elders think different. A little money, a great deal of work, and that's all that's needed. McGin makes a prime leader."

"Joel, have you promised to put your money into that scheme? Was that why you sold your property in Tennessee?" I demanded.

"Hush! Not so loud. We'll wake McGin— Every dollar I put into a scheme will bring you back a dozen, Jeffy."

I warmly assured him I never gave a thought to his money, but that I did worry lest trouble come to him, even as it had to poor Herman Blennerhassett. But now McGin was uneasy in his sleep and was muttering fragments of Spanish and French and we ceased our whispered conversation. I was worrying when I fell asleep and my frame of mind was disagreeable when I awoke in the morning.

After an early breakfast Joel and McGin left the house to find a boat in need of a pilot. I was tired of inaction. Polly was busy in the cook-house with Margy, and to kill time I walked into town.

Almost the first man I met was Greenberry Spiller. He greeted me warmly, as if we had been friends for many years, and somehow I found his comforting assurance that all was well with life very soothing. His words flowed oily, and by repetition he encouraged one to think of ease and happiness. There was nothing in his personal appearance to suggest success, and yet he spoke lovingly of the past, as if it had been a benefactor, and most optimistically of the future. As I listened to him I forgot his makeshift garments and got the impression he had fared richly throughout many years. He never hinted at hardships or ill luck. All had been well. Before I knew it, I was telling him about my uneasiness.

With a beaming smile he quickly told me:

"Idleness, my son. That's your sickness, and it's mighty soon cured. You must get to building. You must be doing something useful— There! See that man with the gray beard, Abel Annis? He's happy and contented. He's doing a good service to mankind. He's making salt out at Mann's Lick, some dozen or more miles from here. He's in town to hire men. What would life be without salt? Or if the salt hath lost its savor?"

"One could work there and be in town on Sundays," I muttered.

"Just the right distance to keep a man

busy, yet give him a place to see the sights when he has a day off."

On impulse I decided to talk with Mr. Annis. I caught up with him and spoke his name, and said:

"Are you looking for salt-makers? How much do you pay?"

He eyed me shrewdly and replied:

"Not quite so fast, son. First, what do you know about making salt?"

There was but one answer I could give. He nodded and continued:

"You can see that a man who knows the work is worth more'n a beginner. But you're young and strong and can learn. I'll give you a dollar a day and your keep. I couldn't afford to do that if there wa'n't such a big demand for salt. I'd double my trade if I could get enough good help. The wells in Ohio, on the Kenawaha, and at Bullet's, let alone my wells, can't supply the demand. The movers, fur traders, and new settlers are calling for more'n more all the time. When can you come?"

"Sometime today. I've a few things to attend to first."

"You won't come," he prophesied. "If you really want work, my kind of work, you'd start with me for the Lick right now."

"Will the job be waiting until sometime tonight?"

"Until tomorrow morning. Go with me now and ride all the way in the cart."

"The walk is nothing. I believe you'll see me sometime tonight," I told him.

"I don't believe it; and I'll say good-by."

As I was making for the cabin, Spiller joined me and eagerly asked—

"Going to be a salt-maker?"

"I think so. I must be there before tomorrow morning if I take the work."

"Then I think I'll go along with you. My Promised Land is in northern Ohio; but I don't want to go up there alone. It's the land the Psalmist had in mind when he sang his songs of fatness."

Promising to look for him in front of the court-house, I hurried on to the cabin. Polly greeted me with the query—

"What wind-mills you been fighting since breakfast?"

"One I'll call home-sickness. I'm hungry to look on the Little Tennessee, where it breaks clear of the Smoky Mountains."

"You're not planning any foolish Tennessee trip?" she sharply asked.

"No, I can't go that far from Joel. Only a matter of twelve or fifteen miles."

"Well?"

It was explosive and peremptory. I stopped gathering up my few belongings and explained Annis' offer and my decision to accept it.

"You! A salt-maker?" she jeered. "You don't mean it. If you'd want work you could have gone with your step-pap and learned the two-mile reach down to Shipping Port. It's good enough for him and for my father. But a salt-maker—" And she laughed in a way that stung.

"There's nothing disgraceful about salt-making," I told her as I seated myself at the corner of the table to print a few lines for Joel's eye. I made it brief, as Joel tired quickly even of print. I promised to return and see him by the Sabbath at the latest.

Polly watched me in silence. When I had finished my message and thrust out my hand she clasped her hands behind her—

"You have no business to leave your step-pap like this," she rebuked. "You were keen enough for him to get back."

"But I'm only a few miles away. I can see him every Sabbath. I can borrow a horse and ride in any night. He's away on the river all day. He won't miss me much. Shake hands, Polly. When I come back we'll talk about Quixote."

As she persisted in keeping her hands behind her, and remained staring at me angrily, I was forced to limit my farewell to words and take my rifle and blankets and leave her. I had barely passed through the door when something hit me between the shoulders and on the ground was the Quixote book. I picked it up and shook the dirt from the leaves and would have thrust it inside my hunting-shirt, but she came from the doorway, a fiery fury, and snatched it from my hand and darted into the house and closed the door.

Margy from the corner of the house signaled for me to enter the cabin, but I did not care to risk it. So my start in increasing the world's supply of salt was rather a dreary setting forth. What I could not understand was why Polly McGin could so dislike me as to hurl a gift book at my head, and why she should insist on taking the book back. I realized my decision, brought about by irritation of my useless way of living, had been very abrupt, and perhaps would have lost nothing had I waited and talked with Joel. Even while moodily walking to town I had my doubts about liking the work. I was quite sure Joel would be disappointed when he returned home and found me gone. I consoled myself by remembering the distance was short and that I could leave the work if I did not like it.

On second thought I decided I was not as foot-free as I was before the girl had scoffed at me. She had ridiculed the notion I would remain any length of time at the lick. If only to prove her mistaken I must stay a decent interval. This realization that I had committed myself made me detest the job before I saw it.

I CAME upon Greenberry Spiller in front of the court-house, and he greeted me, saying:

"Had a notion you'd change your mind and not come. We have mighty fine day for our little walk."

"Then let's be going. I've scarcely noticed the weather."

"You will, when you're old as I be and can come pretty close to knowing just about how many fair days remain for your life. It's all measured out in the beginning and we use up the bulk of our share without thinking, just like a man will waste his property. But when you're down to the last few dollars, or fair days, they begin to mean something. There can't be many more wonderful sunrises for me. I only hope I'll reach northern Ohio before my last sunset."

"You've been a preacher at some time?"

"Ever since 1800. That's when the first camp-meeting was held, and for five years it seemed as if every one at a revival had the 'jerks.' Religion seemed to take us that way. Just shook the devil out of us, as I see it. I was one of the first Stonites, or New Lights, as they was afterwards called. We was followers of Barton Warren Stone, a Presbyterian in this State. The Campbellites sprung up from the Stonites. You left your folks well?"

"In fine spirits."

"That's a rare young female at Mister McGin's cabin. I have an idea she'll make life something of a problem for the man lucky enough to get her."

"That'll be a long time ahead. Polly is only a child. And rather willful."

"All of them be," he heartily assured. "My third wife was worse'n the other two."

I was silent for most of the journey to Mann's Lick. My companion had no difficulty in keeping up with me, although I walked with a long, rapid stride. He talked almost all the time and appeared to be happy to have me for a listener. When he was not dealing in generalities and lamenting the meager goodness in mankind — often speaking of the race as "worms"—he centered his discourse on the Ohio lands.

"I'm dumbfounded when I see how patient God is with such truck as we poor mortals be," he remarked.

Then he was off at a tangent and radiantly optimistic over the blessings in store for every one. He even laughed derisively at the idea of earthly sunsets comparing with the beauties to be unfolded beyond the grave. Much of his chatter annoyed me; much of it amused me. Yet, withal, the abiding effect of his rambling talk was pleasing and made me feel more kindly toward my fellows, including Polly McGin, and the problems ahead.

For one thing I ceased my self-pity, and the picturing of myself as being neglected and forgotten because Joel was learning to be a pilot. My impatience with Polly McGin died within the first half a dozen miles, and I accepted her as very young and very capricious and, somehow, pleasing.

Abel Annis was visibly surprized when Spiller and I walked in on him at early evening. After supper he talked kindly to me. Looking back to that evening I can see he was suspicious about my remaining long with him. He gave a little lecture on salt and explained how important an item it was to the white civilization and touched on the wild stampedes to licks by wild and domestic animals as proof of its dietary value. He was endeavoring to make me understand that salt-making was a highly honorable and most useful occupation. As I was about to turn in he pleased me by saying—

"You shall try your hand at carting salt to Louisville, making yourself useful at the wells between trips."

"I'd like some sort of mixed work myself," spoke up Spiller. "Little chores here'n there that'll let me exercise my legs a trifle."

"I believe I can use you, Greenberry," Annis assured him.

Early in the morning we were out at the salt works where a dozen men were already busy. There were a dozen or more log cabins scattered around the lick. Wells dug to various depths tapped the subterranean pools. These wells passed through a stratum of muddy clay and then penetrated several feet of slatey rock. It was beneath the latter the salt water was found. With salt found in our section of the country only in a state of solution the settlers had to depend on the sagacity of wild animals in locating the hidden deposits. The animals not only drank the water but ate the earth. Mr. Annis told me that the Ohio Saline, or spring, twenty miles from the mouth of the Wabash, was surrounded by several acres of impregnated earth, which area had been lowered from six to ten feet by the animals which came there to lick up the salty dirt.

Spiller at once endeavored to fix by mathematics, using problematical numbers of deer and other animals, the length of time required to carry away in quadrupeds' stomachs so many cubic feet of earth. And the immensity of his calculations held him silent and idle for several hours.

All around the place was scattered the bones of huge animals, dug by the workmen from the muddy clay. Some of these belonged to monsters long since vanished from the earth. Spiller, seated on a section of what had been a huge skull, broke his silence by exclaiming—

"How thoughtful is natur'! She preserves his head so it can be dug up to be used by me as a stool."

Annis bruskly directed him to lend a hand and help me and some of the men lower a long, hollow tree trunk into a pit. This natural tube was fully four feet in diameter on the inside and long enough to reach from the surface to the slatey rock awaiting to be pierced. It was roomy enough to permit one man to work within it, and his first duty was to calk the bottom so as to stop fresh water from oozing in. It also prevented the caving in of the walls. Once it was tightly calked the bottom rock was pierced and the salt water rose and filled the hollow trunk. Sometimes the water boiled up so rapidly that the workman had to be hurriedly helped out to escape drowning. Mr. Annis borrowed the idea of the hollow tree from wells sunk on the Kenawaha. Many of our springs could be worked without any such aid.

At the end of the day I had worked at the wells, at boiling water away from the salt, at drying it, and sacking the finished product and storing it in a long log house. During this passing from one task to another—purposely arranged by Mr. Annis so I could obtain a general idea of all the steps taken in the preparation of salt in the bag from salt water— I occasionally glimpsed Spiller. I could not see he had done anything except to talk and get in the way. As for myself, it was the hardest day's labor I had undergone, and by the time I had washed I was almost too tired to eat my supper. Spiller was lively as a cricket.

Mr. Annis eyed me quizzically and remarked:

"Your back aches, of course. But you'll get your muscles used to it. You're starting in well. Mustn't tucker you completely out at the start. To-morrow you can drive in a load of salt to Louisville."

I was greatly pleased as I suspect I was beginning to develop a second attack of homesickness. Greenberry spoke up, saying—

"I'd better go along with him to lend a hand."

Mr. Annis shook his head and said—

"I shall need you here, Greenberry."

When we were alone he told me:

"Old man ain't worth a hoot as a worker. But someone must feed him and bed him. Besides, his talk keeps the boys cheered up. Best thing in the world is always about to come to the man he talks to. Fair weather is sure for to-morrow. The men laugh at him a bit, yet they've taken to him. So I'll keep him fussing around. His talk on monsters that lived in Kentucky ages ago worked on the clay-diggers so they were actually keen to dig faster and see what new skeletons they could find."

I liked the old man, but I was glad he was not going with me on this, my first visit to the cabin. And I wanted to be alone on the way to town. There was no room for meditation when he was about.

My farewell message to Joel was not forty-eight hours old when I walked up to the cabin. Polly had seen me far down the path and stood in the doorway as I approached. She was back in trousers and the red sash around her slim waist gave a brave bit of color to the picture she made. Her small face, to my surprize, was clouded as she greeted me, saying—

"Got enough of it this quick, Mister Salt-Maker?"

"I love the work. I'm in town on business for Mr. Annis. I must be returning after the horses are baited and rested. What did Joel say?"

"Nothing. He acted rather gloomy. Father told him it would do you good, but that you'd soon get tired of raw hands and a broken back. But come in. You're not company yet."

MARGY bustled about and placed food on the table although I insisted I had eaten in town. While she was doing this Polly also was busy. She brought me a package wrapped in brown paper—

"For you to take back," she said.

I took the package and said—

"These are books."

"You may be lonely and want them to read."

I put them aside and told her:

"I can't take your books. Besides, I'm too tired to read when it comes night. Tell me what's happened since I left."

She laughed in great delight; then replied:—

"The four of us have eaten one supper, one breakfast. Margy and I have eaten our dinner."

I grinned sheepishly and confessed—

"Seems like I'd been gone longer than that."

She was serious immediately and made me feel better by earnestly saying:

"Seemed awfully long to us, too, Jeffry. Why not come away from that place? Of all work, when Louisville is full of places to work! Why don't you work for some merchant in town?"

"Not indoors. I can't do that. I've taken this job and I must stick to it if only to prove your father's mistaken."

"But see here! You shouldn't be silly, Jeffry. Just because father didn't believe you'd stick is no reason for your sticking. Never punish yourself just to prove some one guessed wrong."

"You talk as wisely as Greenberry Spiller, Polly. Now listen to me—

"When you met me at the door you were afraid I'd quit."

She wanted to deny this, but could not. But with a woman's logic she eagerly insisted:

"Now you've proved you could stick there's no sense in sticking. So take the horses and cart back and tell that man you're through with salt-making."

I shook my head, and invited—

"Let's walk along the river. I've been away so long, it must have changed a lot."

Never had she been so companionable as on that day. She was a new Polly and I studied her stealthily, expecting ambushes where none existed. I was amazed to hear her agreeing with me, as heretofore her first instinct had seemed to be to find reasons for denying whatever I might say. And this new bearing left me suspicious, I told her:

"Somehow you've changed. You seem older."

"A day older. Perhaps it's because I'm back in long breeches." And she glanced down at the doeskin trousers tucked into the tops of her moccasins.

We talked about my work, about Joel and McGin. She knew no more about the Mexican enterprise than I did; but she favored it because her father believed in it. I did not argue with her and left the subject so that the harmony of the brief visit might remain unbroken. I left a long verbal message for Joel, saying I enjoyed my work and surely would spend the Sabbath with him. We parted at the cabin and she was standing there, waving her hand as I caught my last glimpse of her and I admired the bravery of her red sash and red hair.

I met Margy, who had gone for provisions while we were walking along the river bank, and paused to say good-by to her.

"Polly in trousers suggested a Polly on a journey. I was lucky to find her at home," I added.

"If you hadn't found Pretty at home you'd seen her sooner," she replied.

"That doesn't sound reasonable, if you please, Margy."

"It will some day after you've grown up, she said softly.

I wondered how the impossible could be possible. A vagrant notion that she meant Polly would have looked me up at Mann's Lick was too absurd. Although she might come that distance to have a quarrel. As to "growing up," that was nonsense. I had attained my growth and stood an even six feet in my moccasins. Not until I was well along the Sheperdsville road to Mann's Lick did I finally decide her ambiguous speech could have only one meaning. I still rejected the thought as being absurd but believed she meant the child had planned paying me a visit.

There followed three weeks of hard work, brightened each Sabbath day with visits to the cabin. By this time Joel was reconciled to my absence, but insisted it would have been better had I secured work in Louisville. McGin rallied me on rough hands and recommended Greenberry Spiller as a model. I could tell by his laughing remarks that he and Joel, while returning from Tennessee, had discovered that the old man had no lust for manual labor and in that particular was similar to the lilies of the field.

Had he been less given to long speeches and his quaint philosophy he would have made an excellent trader. He bought some pretty combs out of his first wages and sold them at a good profit on one of our trips to Louisville. By what fashion of talk he had wheedled Louisville housewives into buying from him what they could buy at a lower price in the town's stores I never knew. Possibly each comb had a romantic history; or perhaps his droning talk benumbed the reason.

The work wore on me although I would not admit it. It no longer tired me physically, as my muscles caught the trick after the first week and were well adapted to digging and lifting. But I felt myself slipping mentally. My roaming life with Joel had ill fitted me for steady application to monotonous labors. Abel Annis was a just man and a most excellent employer; but he was no company for the vagabond-minded. After the day was finished he was for bed, or kept himself busy on his accounts. I listened so long and often to Greenberry Spiller that I was in danger of finding him a nuisance. Yet if it had not been for his garrulity, and his strange flights of fancy, my life would have been even more colorless. Pride kept me to it. And each visit to the cabin brought McGin's laughing query—

"Now are you ready to quit?"

And I would feel impelled to remain a bit longer to prove the job had not conquered me. Talking with Polly was very refreshing, now she had ceased her quarrelsome ways. I do not mean by this that there were no occasions when the sparks did not fly. But they turned to ashes before they could burn.

ONE mid-week afternoon Mr. Annis called me from the wells and pleased me by saying—

"Take a horse and ride into Sheperdsville and collect this account."

Greenberry Spiller, loitering near and trying to find a small shovel, called out—

"I'd better go with him to see he ain't robbed."

"No, Greenberry. You stay here. Lang, take one of my pistols. But you won't need it. The road's safe enough."

I thrust a flint-lock pistol in my belt and set off, riding slowly to prolong the journey. A mile from the Lick my horse shied and I was reaching for my weapon when Spiller stepped out of some cherry bushes and waved greetings.

"Annis changed his mind and let you come?" I asked as he walked by my stirrup.

"I changed my mind," he cheerfully explained. "Greenberry Spiller is white and free-born. There ain't no one in all this glorious country to say when he shall come or go. I'd look pretty wearing a yoke in the last few days of my life. And just look at that sky! As blue as that McGin child's eyes! You can't enjoy that sky while standing ankle deep in muddy clay, or down in a well, or bending under a heavy load. It's hung up there for us worms to see and like."

I had never seen him bogged in mud, down a well, or bending beneath heavy loads.

"Annis won't like it," I warned.

"He can always leave it. Anyway, I'm almost thinking I've stayed long enough at the Lick. If I had enough money I'd put in a good stock of Bibles and work my way on a flat to Louisiana and make a fat profit. They need the Good Book down there most mortal. Then I'm always being tugged in the opposite direction, toward the Psalmist's land in northern Ohio. A paradise of milk and honey. Soil so fat that crops spring up almost overnight."

Sheperdsville was a small settlement and my errand was soon done with the trader. After paying his bill he went with me to the tavern, where we ate and talked for some time. He treated Greenberry to more liquor than was good for the old man. There were a few loungers in the room, and all of the usual type. They spent their time in the barroom while their women worked. The merchant remarked on the pistol in my belt and regretted that one must go armed because of the rough and lawless characters drifting through the country from the East, unsavory camp-followers of every army of migration. I said I had no fear of being disturbed and had brought the weapon at Mr. Annis' insistence. My old habit of scouting a place to please Joel had returned the moment I entered the barroom, and I had mechanically observed every man entering and leaving the low room. And I believe I classified them quite correctly.

I was bothered to name the occupation of but one man. But he was enveloped in a long, blue cloak and sat back in a corner, his head bowed forward, apparently in sleep. As I rose to depart a ray of sunlight found the corner and aroused him and I beheld an angular face of yellowish color, and I put him down as recovering from a bilious fever. His eyes met mine for an instant as they swept a glance around the room. Then his head sank forward.

Greenberry had talked the man behind the bar into standing treat, and as he already had had more than enough I proceeded to get him away before he became helpless. Once out-of-doors I chided him; but he defended himself thus:

"There's oceans of good liquor in the world I won't ever get a whack at— A little wine for the stomach's sake— There'll be no rye whisky beyond the grave— If it's a sin, then I've cut down some poor, weak critter's supply. If it be good for the stomach, I'm a few snorts ahead— Ever stop to think what a cluttered-up place heaven would be if we could take our goods along with us? How merciful that we'll all be outfitted according to our needs— I'll walk this off inside of a mile; but I hate to."

"Get on the horse. You'll be tumbling under his feet," I commanded.

He obeyed, with my assistance, just as he could be induced to take the best of any situation. As I plodded along beside him, he insisted his condition was very much worthwhile if only as a horrible example. This thought inspired him to tell me:

"I've sacrificed myself as a warning to you, Jeffry. I wanted you to see the harm in liquor when consumed too muchly. In one glass there seems to be a blessing. In two you find the fang of the serpent."

"You're old enough to know better," I shortly told him; for I had not planned on walking.

He gravely replied:

"A man's worse'n any fool who drinks whisky before he's sixty. After that he's a fool to let it alone if he wants it. Take a man of my age and he must warm himself from outside as the mortal fires are dying out."

Satisfied he would not fall off, I loitered along behind him, trying to keep my ears closed to the fragments of philosophy he kept hurling at me over his shoulder. The sun was low, and our progress was so slow it would be early evening by the time we reached the Lick. The road was lonely and for much of the way bordered by dense bush growth, sprung up after the road was cut through the old forest. Now I was glad to have the pistol, although I had no notion I would need it.

In a creaking voice Greenberry commenced singing:

"Cursed be the man who e'er shall raise
His sacrilegious hand
To drive fair liberty, our praise!
From his own native land."

As he was finishing the verse I was startled by a whining voice in the bushes on my left which pleaded—

"Kind stranger, help me!"

"Where are you? Who are you? What's the matter?" I demanded, and Greenberry turned his horse and ambled back to me.

"Some one in want?" he queried

"Here. Help me!"

The bushes moved and as I was about to advance I glimpsed an angular, yellow face. Then a long arm shot upward and I was on my face in the road in time barely to escape the long knife quivering in a white walnut.

With a scream of rage at the atrocious assault I pulled my pistol and fired while kneeling. Then I was up and had a fleeting glimpse of a tall man, with the right shoulder hunched up under his ear, running into the timber. Hanging on the bushes was a long blue cloak. Regardless of my unarmed condition I started in pursuit. Great good fortune had thrown Dancer into my path in the day time. Suddenly I was hurled violently to the ground, the breath knocked from my lungs, and Greenberry Spiller was ahead of me, whooping like an Indian and riding like a madman.

I was badly shaken and by the time I could recover my wind Greenberry was returning and boasting:

“I nearly caught that scoundrel. The Lord’s wrath fall on all such as he!”

“Amen!” I gasped.

Greenberry recovered the long knife and would have kept it had I not held out my hand.

“I’d run him down if you hadn’t bumped into me.”

“He’s evil. His act shows he’s a child of Satan. I saved your life by bumping you.”

I bitterly lamented Dancer’s escape; but it couldn’t be helped. The rest of the journey was covered rapidly. I found Mr. Annis and turned over the money and pistol and related my experience.

“Dancer? That name was known some years ago. But he’s dead,” he murmured.

“I have his knife in my belt. By good luck it isn’t through my neck.” Then I announced I was through with salt-making and must return to Louisville at once.

“But I’ll start men after him at once. I’ll send a rider to Sheperdsville. He’ll either be caught, or will leave the country. He’ll never bother you or any one else in this part of Kentucky again.”

I insisted I must go. He kindly insisted I take a horse and his pistol and wished me good luck, and urged me to return any time I felt like it. And after hurriedly eating my supper I rolled my books in my blankets and taking my rifle, rode for Louisville.

I saw nothing of my enemy on my way to town; nor did I believe he was ahead of me. He had struck from cover and had failed. He would slip away to await another chance. Nevertheless I was worried until I had stabled the horse and was running up the river path. Joel met me at the door, having heard my steps.

“Dancer’s in Kentucky. Very close to us!” I blurted out as I passed inside and closed the door.

His face grew older at my words and, after a moment of staring, he took his rifle from the pegs and examined the priming and then extinguished the candle. I could hear Margy singing in the cook-house. Still panting from excitement, I rapidly narrated my experience.

“Oh, Lord, I thank Thee for fetching the boy through unhurt! Twisted, yaller face and a high shoulder— That’ll be Dancer. —— him!”

There was no sign of life in the adjoining room, and I asked—

“Where’s McGin and the girl?”

“Bully’s down the river. Took her along. Gone two days. Won’t be back for I don’t know how long. Has to see some folks in New Madrid about that Mexican business.” As he talked he got together his few personal effects and rolled them in his blankets.

“You’re leaving?”

“Jeffy, you’n me are going to put the Ohio between us and that yaller-faced dog!”

“But the McGins—”

“Write them a letter. Tell them what’s happened. Needn’t bother to tell how Dancer looks. McGin knows him by sight.”

“IF I’D only killed him in his tracks!” I lamented.

“You’re mighty lucky to be alive. You must ’a’ flopped quick to dodge his knife. No one can cast a blade quicker’n more deadly ’n he can.”

“Where shall I tell them we’re going?” I asked as I hung blankets at the windows before relighting the candle.

“Say we don’t know, but will send him word. Just as soon as I’ve pick’ this flint and get some food from Margy we’ll be going.”

I lighted the candle and found writing materials. Then I protested:

“But why should we run? Why not turn hunters and hunt for Dancer?”

“Hunt for a weasel that wants to hide!” he jeered. “I’ll hunt anything on legs, Jeffy, that I can see. But we’ll not hunt for that yaller-face. Write your letter.”

He went outside with his rifle to watch the path. With a heavy heart I began explaining to the McGins the reason of our flight. And I realized how happy I had been since meeting them. And I wondered that I ever had tired of the humdrum existence. Now we were fleeing from a shadow again; and senselessly so, I believed. I had seen him and had tried to catch him. He had run from me. He had failed to make a kill even when he had all the advantage. I could not share Joel’s awful dread of him. I told McGin we were crossing the river and would communicate with him later. And I warned him not to let Polly roam about alone.

I wrote separately to her, giving her all my books and promising I should return and look her up some day. When the letters were finished I extinguished the candle and stepped outside and told Joel I was ready.

"Stretch out on the grass and watch the path while I go around to Margy and explain matters and get some food," he directed.

He had barely gained the cook-house when I discovered a figure approaching from the town. It seemed to be too good to be true that Dancer should come to us in this open fashion. The light was vague but the figure in the path was distinct enough to furnish me an easy target. I threw up my rifle and kept it covered until it might get close enough to establish its identity. The instant I knew it was Dancer I would shoot with no more compunction than I would feel in killing a moccasin.

In disappointment and disgust I lowered my rifle as the man in the path commenced singing in a shrill and creaking voice:

"'Stand to your guns,' says valiant Ford, 'let's die upon 'em here
Before we let the sav'ges know we ever harbored fear.'
Our cannon-balls exhausted, and artill'ry men all slain,
Obliged were our musket-men the enemy to sustain."

Joel came running around the corner of the house. I called to him—

"It's only Greenberry Spiller singing the song of 'St. Clair's Defeat.' "

"Hold him off till you make sure! I've got him lined! Dancer 's seen him. Dancer can be a dozen different men!"

"Says Colonel Gibson to his men, 'My boys be not dismay'd,
I'm sure that true Virginians were never yet afraid.
Ten thousand deaths I'd ruther die——' "

"Stop that racket!" I sharply called out. Then to Joel—

"It's Greenberry."

Spiller ceased his dismal singing and cheerily greeted—

"Evening, folks, even if I can't see you."

"We're lying on the ground. Why are you here?" harshly asked Joel.

"When I found my young friend was upset by that pesky robber I borrered another horse and rode after him. I was afraid that man would sneak up on him a second time. I'd saved his young pelt once; I was keen to save it again."

"You knocked him down when he had a chance to catch that serpent," muttered Joel. "You call that saving him?"

"Mister Snow, I seldom touch a drop of strong drink. Now I'm wondering if Divine Providence didn't arrange for me to get drunk so he'd lend me his horse and go it afoot. Why, Mister Snow, if he'd been up on that horse he'd been a helpless target. But I want nothing but his good-will for saving him; and his good-will I've always had."

"He'd talk acorns away from the devil!" muttered Joel. "But the Almighty don't have to get folks drunk to save a man's hide. Still it was lucky for you, Jeffy, that he overstepped."

I told the old man:

"You come only to find us going away, Greenberry. But it was kindly in you to think of me."

"Kindness don't count nothing, and is paid back ten-fold on Canaan's happy shore. As to going away, so be I. We'll go along together. We'll cling to the old wreck of Zion and sink down to glory together. But I only wish we was bound for that Eden in northern Ohio! If you could only see that fat soil and sift the rich dirt through your fingers! If you could only look on them fair, open meaders with the grass so deep a cow wading through it wouldn't show any more'n a snake! If you could only feast your eyes for miles in every direction and see nothing but fatness and fairness, milk and honey!"

"It's an open country?" asked Joel.

"Open and flowing with goodness. No clearings to be made. Scratch the fat soil with a stick and crops spring up that 'll bung out your eyes. Our big trouble will be trying to get what we raise under cover."

Joel was silent for a minute; then asked:

"What say, Jeffy, to going up there? Might as well travel up there as anywhere. I want to get away from the river."

WE CROSSED the river at Jeffersonville and made up the Berry Trace, traveling a bit west of north. We were fleeing from a cowardly assassin because we believed him to be more terrible than any danger we could face.

I keenly regretted Joel's refusal to turn about and hunt him down; but, although as brave a man as I ever saw, fear of Dancer was his one weakness. His mind was possessed by the notion Dancer could be everywhere. Reason must have told him the man could not be ahead of us, for none knew which way we would travel. Yet whenever we sighted a house Greenberry Spiller was given my former work and would reconnoiter the place and report back before Joel would enter it.

We traveled rapidly and soon changed our course to the east, moving over the Whetzel Trace; and this path we held until we struck into the road that led north from Cincinnati. And so we hurried on, fleeing from fear and impatient to reach the land Greenberry Spiller was ever picturing as an earthly paradise, fit for the songs of the Psalmist—a fat, rich land of broad meadows and tall grass.

CHAPTER V

TROUBLES

WE TRAVELED by the way of Fort Jefferson, built by St. Clair in 1792, and five miles farther on we skirted Greenville, where Wayne built a fort, and where he concluded treaties of peace with the Northwest tribes in 1795. Joel was opposed to halting for the night at any house, for fear of leaving a trail. He appeared to be as eager as Greenberry Spiller to reach the new country. At Greenville he remained outside the settlement while Spiller and I went in and bought two axes, seedcorn, lead, powder and various other necessities. Spiller assured us Indian traders were constantly passing through the country between the mouth of the Sandusky and the Maumee and would supply us with much we needed. When I learned we were within ten miles of St. Clair's battlefield I was very curious to visit it, but my companions only knew the one word "haste." We swung from the road to take a northeasterly course that led us across the heads of the Auglaiz.

I enjoyed the long journey immensely. It was like old times to be sleeping in the open. It was the end of September and the nights were growing cold and we did well to hurry as there was a stout cabin to be built against the winter. As to the climate, however, Spiller was very insistent that the winds blowing over the Great Lakes tempered the weather to unusual mildness. He even insisted the temperature would be higher than on the Ohio. We also gathered from his many detailed descriptions of the country that the wide, rich meadows were bounded on the north by towering forests, forming a barrier against violent, even if salubrious, winds. Snow would fall, he admitted, but not to any depth, and the spring would come early with benign breezes, singing birds and a great variety of wildflowers.

After we were clear of the last settlement and were traveling mile after mile through solitudes, Joel was the nearest to his old self of any time since his talk with the Chickasaw on the Mississippi bluff.

When we had swung in close to the Sandusky river about a mile above the Wyandot village at Upper Sandusky, Greenberry Spiller revived my recollections of an old tragedy by announcing:

"Here's where Colonel William Crawford lost his fight with the Indians—it's near here they burned him on the Tyemochte. We could go there—"

"No, no—" broke in Joel—"Who wants to see that savage spot?"

"I just mention it," explained Greenberry. Then he pointed out on the prairie and continued:

"The fighting started out there in the tall grass. Indians was hid there. Then it was a race to see which side could first reach Battle Island—that grove of timber on the right. Just look here a minute."

We followed him, I fascinated and Joel scowling at the cruel memories. Greenberry led us to a big oak and pointed to where the bark had endeavored to heal over and hide deep scars. He explained:

"After the fight the Indians used their axes in getting bullets out of the tree—They had a wicked way of chewing a bullet so's it would make a fearful wound. Some of Crawford's men was buried in the swamp just behind us. Want to go there?"

I shook my head. Joel asked—

"You were here in 1782?"

"I was, and fighting my bigness. I was in the rear-guard when the army under Colonel Williamson fell back to the Ohio. At the start Crawford led the army but we hadn't gone a mile before he stepped out to learn what had become of his son, John, his son-in-law, Major Harrison, and his two nephews. As the men went by him he'd keep calling out the names of his people. He was doing it when I passed him. I never see him again."

We stared at the grove of timber, surrounded by open country, and Joel said:

"This soil looks fertile. Is this the land you've been talking about?"

"No, sirree! Not by a jugful! If it was I wouldn't want to stay here. Too near what I went through in '82. Too near the Indians still living along the Sandusky. No. We travel northwest for fifty miles at a guess. Wyandots and Ohio Senecas on this river. They'd never harm us and they'd greet us as brothers; but where we'll go we'll have it all to ourselves."

"Let's be moving on," urged Joel. "I don't feel as confident as you do, Greenberry." And he swept a suspicious glance around us. "I've heard rare stories about that Shawnee, Tecumseh, trying to stir up the Indians."

"I can talk any Indian into warm friendship in no time," boasted the old man. "But this ain't the promised land. Mighty rich and satisfying. Lots of bear, catamount, deer and foxes in these parts, but we've come to find the best. That's up north. Rich and fat and mighty high forests near enough to furnish logs and fuel, but not cluttering up the planting ground."

We traveled for three days, seeing no human being. I remarked on this fact, as I had expected to find others hurrying to take up the choice lands.

"It's Indian land," said Joel; and I could see he was disturbed. "Folks are scared to come in. That's why no one is ahead of us even to make tomahawk improvements."

"Why, then we don't have any right here!" I said.

"Just as much as we do on the upper Missouri, or where any Indians live," muttered Joel, who could never see that the Indians had any legal rights to land a white man was bound to respect.

"I supposed this was State land we're going to," I insisted.

"It'll soon be government land. What we pick out will remain ours," cheerfully assured Greenberry. "Where we'll stop is just about fifty miles from Crawford's battle-field."

We walked on for a few minutes; then Joel broke out:

"We've covered a strong fifty miles already. Where is the open country and the tall grass that'll hide a cow?"

We were traveling through a level and heavily wooded country. We could see but a short distance in any direction because of the thick growth of beech, ash, oak and other hardwoods. The season was not far enough advanced for the leaves to fall, although they were coloring smartly where the frost, or sun could reach them. Only a vague light penetrated the forest roof and we were in gloomy twilight even when the sun was overhead.

Greenberry halted as Joel put his blunt query. He scratched his head and stared about as if bewildered. Instead of answering Joel he turned to me and suggested:

"S'pose you climb a tall tree, Jeffry, and take a peek and see if we're traveling in the shortest line to strike into the prairie. You'll see open country mighty near at hand. And that is the land of promise; the land of milk and honey."

I SELECTED a tall elm and climbed to the top and found my eyes gazing across the level roof of a mighty forest. In the north, running westerly, was the suggestion of a ridge. It was sufficient to block my line of vision in that direction, and how far the forest extended beyond it I could not see. Where we had halted was a similar slight rise and I could trace its course toward the west.

Descending I reported:

"Nothing but woods. As thick woods as I ever saw."

Joel gaped at me in amazement; then shifted his gaze to Greenberry. The old man's voice was querulous as he explained—

"Just beyond the hills, but out of sight from here, is the fat soil of the open country."

"There are no hills," I told them. "The land is very level except for a low ridge in the north. When the fall rains come, or the spring snows melt, this country will be overflowed."

"Well, I snum!" exclaimed Greenberry, his face betraying a sudden anxiety. "If this ain't a pretty kettle of fish! Talk about biting the hand that helps you! Why, that man, back in '82 must a lied to me most wickedly! He swore he'd been up here. He told me about it just as I've told you two."

"Surely you've been to this part of the country!" cried Joel.

"I've seen it often in visions, but not as if I'd come up here afoot," slowly confessed Greenberry. "I've seen it through the eyes of a man I s'posed I could trust as I could trust a brother. But the nearest I've been to it in person till this trip was back in '82, when I was with Crawford on the Sandusky."

"——!" muttered Joel. "Why, we've come on a fool's errand, Jeffy. All this man's gabber about 'promised lands', and 'flowing with milk and honey', and 'grass so tall it hid the cows', and 'fat soil,' was so much nonsense." And he glared accusingly at Greenberry.

The old man defended himself:

"Not all nonsense, friend Joel. Nothing can be nonsense that's found in the Good Book—"

"What's the Bible got to do with Ohio forests?" hotly broke in Joel.

"Well, I believed it," sighed Greenberry. "And when you was bound to get clear of the river I named this place as I believed it to be. No one will ever chase you up here, Joel. We'll build our cabin on the ridge ahead, and from it we'll look down on our fair fields and rich crops. For we'll surely find open country beyond that ridge. That man couldn't a lied about everything. There wouldn't be any sense in that."

"Well, now that we've come this far we can go on a bit farther," slowly decided Joel. "But it's no place to be caught in by winter unless we have a snug shelter and much game near at hand."

"It's the most lonesome place I ever saw," I said; and I had a strong longing for the Kentucky or Tennessee country.

"I ain't been dreaming fool stuff all these years," stubbornly insisted Greenberry. "If I have, I've suffered more'n you two. You're just disapp'inted if things ain't exactly as I've told them. But I'll be plumb discouraged. All my plans have been made to end my days in this northern Eden. If that man lied it's a —— of a way for an honest man to wake up."

"Well, well; talking won't mend it. It is as it is," shortly interrupted Joel.

And we advanced.

Greenberry confidently told me:

"You're eyes will shine and fairly bung out of your head, Jeffry, when you reach that ridge. Joel will sing a different tune then. This timber keeps off the cold winds on the north, skirts the open country on the east and runs along a bit on the south. I remember now that the man in '82 said something like that!"

But my eyes did not shine once we had reached the ridge. It was a slight elevation and scarcely would have been noticed in a less level country. From my second tree I found the same lonely picture. Woods on woods with another slight rise in the north, extending from east to west.

I reported what I had seen. Greenberry appeared to be dumbfounded and I almost pitied him as he stared in silence at the surrounding growth. Joel said:

"We'll follow this ridge to the west a bit. I'm thinking we'll soon be traveling south, or southwest to the Vincennes post-road.

The last was very sweet hearing; for the Vincennes road must ultimately lead us to Kaskaskia, and then up to St. Louis. So I forgave Greenberry for decoying us to the northern wilds. I whistled cheerfully as we walked through the dusk along the ridge. We could see scarcely a rod in any direction. Greenberry, as if desperate to discover something that might offset our disappointment, ranged on ahead.

He started us by giving a whoop. Then he was crying:

"Come on! A stout home is here ready for us!"

We quickened our pace. Deer were running through the growth on either side. Over my shoulder I called out to Joel—

"There's to-morrow's dinner."

I leaped convulsively as his rifle cracked. Then he was steadying me by calling out: "There's our supper. Go ahead. I'll dress the critter and bring in the meat."

Hurrying along I soon came to a stout log house. Trees had been felled and burned for a distance of fifty feet around it, and the charred stumps and logs gave the spot a depressing atmosphere. Greenberry from the open doorway was cheerily crying:

"Home at last! Troubles all over! Moses looked, but could not enter. We're let in to partake of the richness and fatness thereof."

"You'll have to find something besides four walls of logs to satisfy us," I answered. "The owner may not want us for more than a night or two."

"Looks like we might have it all winter. From the rows of shelves some trader must a lived here. Plenty of water everywhere. I've filled a kettle."

Being thirsty I entered and took a drink, and spat it out in disgust. It tasted strong of sulfur. Emptying the kettle I hunted around until I found a spring of good water. As I carried it into the cabin Greenberry filled a mug and drank deeply, and cried:

"Purest, sweetest water I ever drank. Only a liar can say this is a parched land."

"When it begins to rain the whole country except these ridge tops will be afloat," I prophesied.

While waiting for Joel, I stirred up the forest mold with a sharp pick, and found a foot of top soil composed of decayed vegetable matter. If the land was cleared and drained I believed one's grandchildren might have fertile plantations. But I remained convinced the country must be flooded in wet seasons, In the growth on the ridge I noticed black walnuts, maples, red elms, and butternuts. Unfortunately we were not seeking timber lands.

Joel came up with the dressed carcass of the deer, and far off came the howling of a wolf-pack. He cut off enough meat for our supper and hung the rest high in a butternut. All the time the howling of the wolves sounded closer.

"Nothing to mind now, Jeffy," murmured Joel. "But in winter, with game scarce, I doubt if a man would want to venture far from this pile of logs."

"We'll be leaving in the morning."

"Well, we'll see. I've been thinking a bit. Let's look about."

Greenberry had lighted a fire and we examined the long, low room. The empty shelves strongly evidenced a trading post. That he either had gone in a hurry, or was gone on a short trip, was suggested by the kettles by the fireplace. These needed to be cleaned before we could use them.

Greenberry simulated great happiness as the supper was cooking, and resumed his painting of word-pictures. Suddenly Joel told him:

"You keep shut on that kind of talk, Greenberry. You've talked hours about this North Country and you let us think you'd been here. As to this cabin, you didn't build it, didn't know it was here, and found it only by chance. If I hadn't said we'd walk to the west we'd be busy now building a half-faced camp."

"This cabin was meant from the beginning to be here waiting for us," insisted Greenberry.

"What became of the man who used it as a trading-house? Why did he quit? What sent him off in a hurry? So far Jeffy and me feel we've come on a fool's errand. It'll take a generation of hard-working men to clear enough land to raise a decent crop."

Greenberry answered—and rather lamely I thought—

"Well, Joel, I've lived long enough to know the Lord will help them who help themselves. I've had to work, and work mighty hard, for what I've got. But I've never gone hungry or cold."

BY THE time supper was eaten the wolves were snarling and leaping around the suspended deer meat. Joel threw a burning brand among them and they scattered wildly for a short distance. Their green eyes shone in a most uncanny fashion as they shifted about among the trees.

We were used to loneliness and the howling of wolves; but I, at least, was not used to being hemmed in so closely by the forest; and I felt we were smothered. As we sat before the fire I could not resist taunting Greenberry:

"So this is your Land of Promise! These are the wide, fat fields! We have only to look out that hole that answers for a window to see the tall grass that is taller than a cow."

"Softly, softly," murmured Joel.

"I believed in that man in Crawford's army," stoutly defended Greenberry. "He was frantic with fear when I come across him during the fight in the timber of Battle Island. He didn't have any bullets. I gave him half of mine. He had every reason for telling the truth. When the army was falling back to the Ohio he told me about the country up here. I believed him then; I believe him now, with certain changes in what he said. That rich land is up here somewheres. We'll press on and find it."

"We'll go no farther," spoke up Joel as he stared moodily at the fire. "Winter comes on the run up here. We'll stay for a bit and then go back—Greenberry, I believe you were honest in repeating camp-talk for so much truth—"

"Honest as a little child!" broke in the old man.

"But are you sure you haven't deceived us two a-purpose since we got up here?" continued Joel, without removing his gaze from the fire. His question amazed me. I knew the old man was given to exaggerating. I never suspected he would deliberately deceive. And it was not like Joel to be unkind.

I turned a sympathetic glance at Greenberry and was doubly taken aback to see him holding his head low and refraining from any defense.

Joel sternly continued:

"What is it you've been hiding under your coat? And what you've been trying to toss into the fire, Greenberry?"

Had a wolf leaped through the window I would have been less startled than I was by this astounding query.

"Good land, Joel Snow!" feebly commenced Greenberry. "You could tell an eagle how to use his eyes! Keenest man I ever see. It was for your peace of mind. I didn't want to fret you. After we'd had a night's rest I was going to tell the both of you."

"Tell us now."

Greenberry reached inside his coat and brought out a piece of paper, a page from a trader's account book and handed it over to Joel. After one glance Joel frowned and passed it to me, saying:

"It's writing, Jeffy. You read it."

It was an account of credits given to Big Moose, a Shawnee. When I commenced reading this Greenberry interrupted—

"T'other side to find the true inwardness of it."

I turned it over and found a rough, hurried scrawl that was very enlightening. It read:

> Scared of the Injuns. Big Moose means mischief. Taking the last of my goods away to-day.
> PETERS.

As I handed the paper back to Joel, Greenberry eagerly insisted:

"Was going to show it to you first thing in the morning. Don't amount to anything. Trader gets scared and runs away from a mighty fine house. Prob'ly had cheated the Indians and knew they'd even it up. We ain't traders. We're in no danger."

"Is there anything else you've kept from us?" sternly asked Joel.

"Not a blessed thing!"

"Where did you find this?" I added.

"Pinned with a broken knife blade to a log just inside the door. Found it while you was hunting for a spring—There! Now we've got that off our minds, let's be neighborly and enjoy the fire. Let the wolves howl and the wind blow. We're snug and warm. Let the snow come. There's game a plenty. We couldn't raise any crops this season even if we'd traveled a few miles farther and come to the choice land. We're better off in this sheltered place during the crisp, healthy winter. We can easily get enough prime furs to make a handsome profit. ——! But I never dreamed we'd have the luck to stumble on to a good tight cabin like this. Peters' misdoings is our profit. Jeffry, you sing us a song."

Neither Joel nor I was in the mood for singing. I was wondering just when Peters, the trader, had deserted the cabin. An Indian called Big Moose had frightened him away.

Joel broke in on my moody meditations by saying:—

"Must have quit mighty recent, or some Injun would a been here and found and taken away the paper."

Greenberry sang two verses of "St. Clair's Defeat," the wolves howling tremendously, and then he desisted in his effort to cheer us up. We barred the door and took our blankets. The air seeping through the empty window was heavy with the smell of moldering leaves and was raw and cold.

The morning revealed Joel as the energetic, resourceful man. After breakfast he announced:

"We'll scout a bit and see what surrounds us. First thing, Jeffy, you climb a tree and see if you find a smoke."

I did as bid and found nothing but the forest crown and the suggestion of a ridge to the north. So nearly level was the top of the vari-colored roof, it was impossible for me, looking across it, to detect any openings even if they existed. If there were any they were small. After I returned to the ground and reported Joel was silent for a minute. Then he decided.

"Peters must have made for Sandusky Bay, or down the way we came up. Let's travel for a few miles, keeping to the east."

While the autumnal coloring of the hardwoods was daily growing more vivid wherever the foliage was exposed to the sun and the first frosts, our way through the twilight lacked all such decorations. Ferns and brakes and the low-hanging foliage were bleached to a pallid yellow.

As we walked along Greenberry muttered much in his beard, and from what I overheard I assumed he was lamenting our waste of time and was renewing his faith in a Canaan awaiting us a short distance to the north. We traveled about three miles, keeping to the crest of the rise, and halted only when Joel, in the lead, suddenly stopped and drew back a few steps and stared at the ground.

"You've found a sign," I called out as I pressed forward to share in the discovery.

Without turning his head he replied—

"I've found what once was a man called Peters."

I winced as I looked. It was a sorry sight—scattered bones and a torn bundle of clothing.

"May the Lord rest his soul!" whispered Greenberry as he came up and glared at the woful spectacle. "The wolves got him! If he only had his ax handy!"

"The wolves are well fed except during winter. He was used to wolves. He left the cabin this season, or Indians would have called there to trade, or get rum, and have found the message he left."

"But it is the work of wolves," persisted Greenberry. "They've torn him to pieces!"

"After he was dead. Wolves didn't carry away his rifle and trade goods. Wolves never split his skull with an ax. A Big Moose, not wolves, got him. The trader in his writing said he was scared of the Indians. He didn't quit quick enough. See if you can dig a grave with your knives while I scout around."

We managed to inter the poor remains. For the first time since my acquaintance with Greenberry Spiller I saw him violently disturbed. He breathed fast and hard, although I had done most of the work. His eyes were ever shifting around the encircling growth.

"Greenberry, you're scared," I whispered.

"Not scared, but nervous. Let's be getting back to the cabin, or make a run for it," he tremulously replied.

"You're scared at the sight of a dead man, murdered by a cowardly, sneaking savage," I accused.

"Tall talk from young tongues," he mumbled. "But you wouldn't talk so brash about 'sneaking savages' if you'd been with me on those terrible June days when poor Crawford was caught and roasted," he said. "If you'd been in the fighting at Battle Island and had seen what I saw, you'd sing a different tune. If you'd been with us when we began to retreat and some of the men believed they'd stand a better show to set off alone and apart from the army, going to their miserable deaths by so doing, you'd feel squeamish. This can be a very cruel country. We who stuck with Williamson got through without much trouble; but those who set off in pairs and small numbers was hunted like rabbits from the Sandusky to the Muskingum. Some were killed within two miles of the Ohio. I'll never forget how we felt when we learned white men were fighting with the Indians, two of the Girtys being among them. Nor how we felt when we saw two hundred Shawnees streaming in to help the enemy."

"There are no Indians in this locality, or renegade white men. Peters was killed some time ago."

He muttered under his breath and continued his uneasy study of the timber. Joel returned from his scouting and said he had found no fresh signs. He asked me to climb a tree. I gained a high perch and my first glance detected smoke in the northwest. Greenberry's grim recital and Peters' tragic death had shaken my nerves a bit. I felt much as Crusoe must have felt when he found the mark of a naked foot in the wet sand. I hastily descended and reported my discovery.

"Face the south and run for it!" urged Greenberry.

"And not only leave your land of milk and honey, but leave our belongings in the cabin?" scornfully asked Joel.

"I shall be showered with many blessings in the way of goods and food and fine raiment, but I have only one earthly life," mumbled the old man.

However, we turned back and hurried to the cabin. Once arrived at the shelter, Joel told us:

"We can't stay here and feel we must keep inside these walls or be killed. But Peters' death don't mean the Indians will kill every white man in these —— woods. Peters may have cheated them. On t'other hand we can't risk staying and learning just what the savages do intend to do.

We'll cook some meat and then shoulder our belongings and travel."

Fear is a queer thing. So long as we were returning to the cabin and I had expected Joel to remain and take his time in leaving I had been very brave, and I had felt contempt for Greenberry's timidity. But once Joel suggested need of flight and ordered meat to be cooked, I was in a wild flurry to be traveling. And I would have preferred not to wait to cook meat, but to depend on game as we fared south. Panic comes when you turn your back.

For the first time during our acquaintance I was discovering Greenberry's capacity for work. With the nimbleness and eagerness of youth he helped with the fire and brought a kettle of water and cut up the meat. And as he worked he was ever glancing behind him and to where Joel sat smoking in the doorway, a rifle across his knees.

BOTH Greenberry and I were inside, busy at the fireplace, when we heard a guttural voice outside. I was on my feet, rifle in hand, without being conscious of making any physical effort. Joel was standing in the doorway. I stepped to the window and felt more composed when I saw the Indians numbered but three. One of these stood in advance of the others. He carried no weapons except an ax in his belt. He wore none of the red man's toggery and yet was an impressive figure. He stood about six feet and appeared to be very muscular. His forehead was high and full and suggested the thinker rather than the fighter. His slightly aquiline nose and the heavy brows overhanging his sharp black eyes gave him an air of haughtiness. The two men back of him were tricked out in the gaudy ornaments the Indians so dearly love. But the leader wore none of these.

Joel had not understood the harsh query put to him and was resorting to the Choctaw trade jargon to say—

"We came here yesterday."

Shifting to the jargon, of which I had a good working knowledge, the leader said:

"Go away, white men, before the sun rises again. This land belongs to my people. It is a big land, but it is not wide enough, or long enough, to hold both white and red."

"You talk with the voice of a chief," said Joel calmly. "Are you Wyandot, Potawatomi, or Miami. How do we know your tribe owns this country?"

"All red people are my people," coldly replied the red man. "The air up here is very bad for white men. Go away. Go to Fort Wayne, or Sandusky. Only a moon ago Harrison, great white chief, speaking for the Seventeen Fires, said white men should not live on red land."

"We were about to go away when you came. The man who lived here tried to go away and was killed. He left a talk in this house, saying he was afraid of Big Moose. We have just come back from burying his bones. When we go away we do not want to have axes stuck in our heads."

"The man Peters would be alive to-day if he had gone when Big Moose told him. He was a bad man. He sold rum to the red men after he was told to stop. He stayed here three sleeps after he was told to go at once. You white men go away before the sun comes up again."

"We have stout walls, good guns, and much powder and lead. If we leave this house we want a road-belt. The Moose may hunt for more white hair."

"Start now and you will need no road-belt."

"Peters, the trader, had no belt. He is a ghost," reminded Joel.

"Start now; or go after the trader!" thundered the leader. "You need no belt when Tecumseh says the road is open."

I stared with all my eyes. The western country was filled with talk about Tecumseh, the man who was teaching a new religion to the Indians, the return to old things and the ancient way of living. He and his one-eyed brother, the Prophet, being of the Shawnee people, had recently been given a village on the Tippecanoe by the Kickapoos and the Potawatomis.

Joel also stared at the speaker and I felt Greenberry Spiller's hand jerk and tremble as it rested on my shoulder. Joel recovered from his astonishment and said:

"If you are Tecumseh your word is good as any road-belt, if your young men understand you have given it. But the ears of the Big Moose may be dull. If he has not heard you gave us an open road, he may follow us. If he does, we shall fight."

"The man behind me, on my right, is Big Moose. He carried a talk from me to Peters, the trader. That man was promised death if he did not leave this place. He is dead," calmly replied Tecumseh. "There are sixty fighting men from Sandusky Bay near here. They go with Tecumseh to Fort Wayne to open another bag of talk with the Seventeen Fires. Your man Harrison will talk for the Seventeen Fires. Tecumseh told the fighting men to stay by their kettles while he brought this talk. They will come here very soon."

And without another word he turned and walked away, followed by the two men. Big Moose, the executioner, made a lasting impression on me.

The moment the three were hidden in the timber, Greenberry Spiller snatched up his blankets and rifle and announced:

"I'm traveling south as fast as the good Lord will let me move my aged feet. I only wish my feet would turn into wings. I've heard Tecumseh speak for the first time. I never want to hear his voice again. If you folks hurry you may overtake me."

"You wait. We'll go together," said Joel. "Get our stuff in shape, Jeffy. It's a short stay we've made in this land of milk and honey, after coming so far to find it; but we've stayed long enough."

"Dear friends, move briskly," begged Greenberry. "That man in Crawford's army never said a word about Indians owning this land."

Twenty minutes later we were on the low ridge a mile south of the cabin. Greenberry surprized me by suggesting a halt while I climbed a tree. I demurred, believing it to be a waste of time. But Joel nodded for me to ascend, and I swarmed up a big oak and found an opening through which I could scan the level top of the forest.

"There's a big smoke on the ridge we just quit!" I called down to my companions, "a big, black smoke!"

And I heard Greenberry tell Joel—

"I knew it! I always had a notion that cabin would burn well."

That was our farewell to the promised land, with billowing smoke staining the sky and warning white men to keep out. A farewell to the promised land, in all truth, could we have but read the years ahead, and have visioned the Big Black Swamp*, cleared and drained, furnishing homes for a great and prosperous people. But we saw only the black smoke, climbing high into the still heavens and sullenly writing the name of the new red leader, Tecumseh. We blamed Greenberry Spiller for having induced us to undertake such a useless and dangerous errand, which instead of rewarding us with a home, offered us the bones of a murdered man.

EVEN Greenberry Spiller was glad to be back on the river although he was left at loose ends until he could find another goal to attack. Since 1782 he had dreamed of the North Country, and he was somewhat bewildered as he cast about to find something to take its place. Like myself he was impatient at our halting on the Indiana shore. We had ended our journey at a small Swiss settlement seventy miles above the Falls. As but one man in the community spoke English and another Spanish—Joel alone understanding the latter—there was no companionship in the place. Greenberry was especially cast down as he had no audience to address now that Joel and I were smarting over the northern venture. He could have left us but, apparently, the thought never entered his head.

The little settlement was called Vevay and on our first night there we were told to make use of a new cabin until its owner should return from Kentucky. After the first day I proceeded to question Joel about his intentions. Throughout our flight from the big swamp he had kept silent. Now that I was asking to learn his plans, he smoked thoughtfully for several minutes, and then delighted me by saying:

"Jeffy, we've quit running away. It was that man Peters, the trader, that changed my mind. He run away and was slaughtered. He'd a better stuck to the cabin and saved his self-respect by going down fighting. We'll bide here a few days and get our bearings."

"And then?" I breathlessly asked.

"We'll turn hunter."

"The game?"

"Dancer, —— him!"

"With all my heart!" I joyfully cried. "But how far shall we seek him?"

"Till we find him. To the Gulf if need be. Hereafter we'll try to keep him in front of us; never behind us."

"The worm turns, and it is good!" piously declared Greenberry Spiller.

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*One hundred and twenty miles long by about forty miles wide. Avoided by early immigrants. By the Brownstown Treaty of 1808 the United States acquired a strip through it for a road, which was built in 1827. In 1859 the State ditched and drained the area and transformed it into a rich farming country.

Joel gave him a cold glance and remarked—

"This is something you can't mix in, Greenberry."

"Never yet put my fingers in another man's dish," warmly replied Greenberry. "But I'll go along just to see you folks have fair play."

Joel unfolded his tentative plans, saying:

"We'll cross to Port William (Carrolton) and see if we can hear anything about him. Then we'll move down the river slowly, crossing from town to town and searching for signs. If we get no trace of him, we'll take a flat to Natchez, perhaps New Orleans, if the trail leads there. If we find a cold trail we'll know he's somewhere in Tennessee, or southern Kentucky, and we'll come north overland. It's a pretty fair-sized chunk of country to cover, but he's somewhere between New Orleans and the Ohio and we ought to find him."

"Good! And the McGins?"

Joel shook his head.

"We won't drag Bully into it. He'd love to lend a hand, but he has the girl to think of. And Dancer has friends; or he couldn't keep under cover so snug. Besides Polly, Bully has a mighty big piece of work to do. Once Dancer is off my mind I'm going to help him."

"That Mexican business will be your undoing, Joel," I warned.

He made no reply. I continued—

"At least we can stop at Lousiville long enough to tell the McGins what we're up to."

"That'll only be fair to them. Maybe I'll have you go alone and take a talk to Bully from me. I don't want him to get the notion I've quit on t'other matter. I ought to be ripe for it once we've made the water trip to Natchez and have returned over the Trace."

That night, for the first time since our flight from the McGin cabin, my emotions were pleasant. We were to turn about and play the hunter. If the Mexican enterprise worried me, I remembered it was some distance ahead; something we might never reach.

In the morning I was slightly disappointed to find Joel in no haste to leave the settlement. He lighted his pipe and said he would retire from the bank and think things over. Greenberry and I walked about among the few houses and from the man who spoke English we learned the settlers originally had located on the Kentucky river but had failed to make a success of grape culture. We watched the men and women preparing their vineyards, from which they were to make many thousands of gallons of good wine. The beginning was meager enough. So far as I could gather the making of wine was to be their one industry.

As we wandered down the river bank below the town Greenberry smacked his lips and mused aloud:

"My dream was true, only I didn't understand it. The Promised Land is right behind us in that clump of houses. It will soon flow bounteously with good wine. What fools we was to think it meant that cold, cussed country up north!"

"Your dream, not mine, nor Joel's," I reminded.

"We can take land here and plant and raise grapes and sit in the shade of our own fig-trees," he continued. "Man's a fool to drink rye whisky when he can have his home-made wine, mild and mellering."

I scarcely heeded him, as before my eyes a river mishap was occurring. A man on a flat tied to the bank a few rods ahead had tripped, or maneuvered so clumsily as to fall into the water; and the river was rising from recent rains in the back country. Only by chance did an outstretched pole come within the man's reach. After he fell into the water and during his rescue two men on the bank near-by laughed heartily. As I ran forward, the man was dragged on board the flat and began cursing those on the bank. It was plain that he and his three companions had been drinking. The four commenced shouting abuse and threatening what horrible things they would do. I smiled at their wild exaggeration, but discreetly, for it is not good to deride Ohio boatmen openly.

The two onlookers ceased their laughing and started up the bank. Three of the boatmen jumped ashore, and one of them bawled:

"Don't run away, fine gen'lemen. We've got something to chew about with you."

The two men were foolish enough to stop. The boatmen advanced on them, and walked steadily enough. There was a business-like savagery in their bearing. The leader announced:

"You see something funny in poor rivermen falling into the water. We're keen to see if you can't laff out the other side of your mouths!"

"Keep off!" sharply warned one of the strangers. "We're officers of the law."

"Law be ——! We're Kentucky boatmen, bound for Natchez and New Orleans. If we dodge the river-sickness at the Natchez landing we ain't scared of any law. You forgot your manners and laffed at us."

And without more ado the three set upon the two, and the five of them commenced mauling and struggling.

Three to two was scarcely fair, and my fight with Shank had prejudiced me against boatmen as a class. The attackers had so maneuvered that when they fell to they were in position to drive the two men over the bank into the river. This was their plan for the man on the flat was brandishing a long pole and eagerly urging:

"Pop 'em over so's I can fetch 'em a bust or two with my pole!"

He was in a fair way of being accommodated, with every prospect of murder being done. So I ran in and caught a man around the neck and sent him spinning. This evened the odds and I was willing to refrain from further interference. The two boatmen were now getting the worst of it and I was about to sit down and enjoy the wring when Greenberry yelled—

"Look out!"

I came to my feet as the man on the boat leaped ashore, while the man I had hurled aside charged me. Before I could notice other details I was fighting ferociously to keep my opponent's gouging fingers out of my eyes. He attacked with such agility, I was hard pressed to beat him off. Once he got me in his clutches he would have an advantage. The fourth man, believing I was accounted for, ran to help his two mates. My adversary seemed determined to come to grips, and after the first flurry of evasion I surprized him by stepping in close and catching him on the jaw with a blow that sent him staggering. I barely had time to clout the fourth man, striking him from behind and stretching him helpless on the ground, before my man was coming at me yelling:

"Just a —— trick!"

We went at it merrily. Greenberry was dancing around the fallen man with a rock in his hand and threatening to brain him if he moved.

One of the strangers found time to shout to me—

"Drive him into the river, young man." And the two couples came within my range of vision as they passed me, the boatmen retreating toward the edge of the bank.

My man, beholding his friends getting the worst of it, made a final assault and was set back with a blow on the chin. He did not return to the fight, but ran and leaped on to the flat. Almost at the moment my man's feet hit the flat the strangers rushed their opponents off the bank and into the water. Greenberry stepped back and allowed his captive to rise and dash madly to regain the flat.

The fight was over. We watched the men clamber aboard, cast off and allow the flat to dance down the current. Then I took time to take account of the strangers. They were lean, sharp-faced men and each carried a pistol in a belt under the coat. It spoke well for their self-restraint that they had refrained from using their weapons when the odds were against them.

One of them said to me:

"My name is Coby. My companion is Sam Allen. It was neighborly of you to pitch in as you did."

I gave my name and Greenberry's, and the four of us shook hands. Allen explained what already I had overheard.

* * *

"WE'RE law-officers. We didn't intend to get into a fuss with those fools." Then he added something that caused an icy shiver to run up and down my spine. For he said:

"We're hunting for a man called Bully McGin. You've heard of him?"

"I and my old friend here have just arrived from up near the Sandusky. This McGin a river-man?"

"You're new to the river or you'd never ask," was the smiling reply. "McGin's much on the river, but he's not a boatman. He's an adventurer, a reckless character. He's on the river too much for his health and the good of the country. We're looking for him and a friend of his."

Greenberry pressed eagerly forward and I inwardly groaned, fearing he was to blurt out the truth. I relaxed when he exclaimed:

"Good land! Law officers after two villains! It's high time the Ohio was made safe for honest folks. What have them rascals been up to? Robbery, I s'pose."

"Conspiring against the United States Government. That's all," replied Coby, and he smiled slightly at the old man's gaping expression.

"But what can they do against the Government out here on the Ohio?" I took my turn to ask.

"Too long to explain. Hard for an honest man to understand. It brings in Mexico and a general run of cussedness. Burr got clear but he left tools to carry on his work. You acted neighborly toward us, young man, and we appreciate it."

Their way was down the river and after some parting remarks they took up their journey and Greenberry and I walked slowly back to the settlement. I ached to run, but held myself in. It is an awful feeling to know the one you love most of all is being sought as a traitor to his country. I knew that Joel never entertained a thought that was in the slightest disloyal. Yet I believed he would be helpless if taken to some Eastern city and placed on trial because of the Mexican business. And I felt very bitter toward Bully McGin for having inveigled my friend and benefactor into the sorry business.

"I talked about right, I think," spoke Greenberry, his bearded face crinkling in a shrewd smile.

"You did well."

We found Joel back in the cabin; and as we hurriedly related what we had learned we saw his face grow old and sorrow creep into his kindly eyes.

"Good land, Jeffy, the Government can have me any time it feels suspicious. Why, Jeffy, you know I could never do anything that would hurt my country! Queer they can't ever get the right of the Mexico business. Spain always made it tough for Tennessee and the Carolinas. If Mexico was took away from her and given to the United States as a present, why ain't that a mighty big service to our country?"

"It's a bad business, Joel. You meant well, but it's a bad mess," I told him. "Aaron Burr was acquitted; but you and McGin were never vice-presidents. You have no powerful political friends. You're just people. They'd likely send you to prison."

"I'd rather die right now then to be shut up," he muttered.

"They didn't name you. They may not know your name. McGin is the man they're most keen to get. But he will never name you. He's done you a bad turn, Joel, no matter how well he meant; but he'll never tell the law-officers your name."

"Bully McGin is a good and honest man," insisted Joel. "I'll stay here with Greenberry while you cross to Port William and catch a flat down to Louisville. You'll tell McGin of the danger so he can light out. You oughter get there ahead of those two men if they're combing the north shore."

I readily agreed to make the trip. I knew there was great need of haste. Once Coby and Allen drew near to Jeffersonville they would hear much about McGin and would quickly learn where to find him. It was decided, on my suggestion, that Greenberry was to watch the river-path, so he might warn Joel if the two officers should return.

Within an hour after our talk I was set across to Port William, where, inside of another hour I bought passage on a Pittsburgh ark bound for Louisville. Unlike the Mississippi, the Ohio was safe for night travel except at the Falls, and we made few stops before anchoring in Bear Grass Creek.

As I went up the bank I had the feeling of having been gone from the town for years. I was surprized on meeting men, with whom I had a speaking acquaintance, to have them nod in passing as if ignorant of my absence.

My heart beat faster as I hurried up the path to the McGin cabin. I dreaded the effect of my news on Polly. I feared I would find the two officers ahead of me and would be called upon to explain my sudden acquaintance with the McGins. And there was the fear that Coby and Allen might arrive while I was in the cabin, and my inability to get word back to Joel.

Yet I was greatly disappointed when Margy flung open the door and with hands stretched out in greeting lamented:

"Oh, I wish you'd come sooner! They've come and gone again!"

"Gone? Where?"

She shook her head and stepped aside for me to enter and explained:

"I don't know where they've gone. Bully McGin's very close about his business. There's a writing for you. McGin left it. I'll get you a bite to eat."

"I can't swallow a mouthful. I'll take

the letter and be going. I brought important news for him. It's very bad he can't receive it."

She brought me a folded piece of paper and said:

"Write your news and I'll give it to him. He's to send me word, telling me where to join him. It's been that way for years. In the open; then in hiding."

I opened the paper. It was addressed to Joel and me; and he had written:

> You may never get this, Joel. If you do it's to say our business is on a high shelf. Signs are bad. Can't tell you when we shall be back on the river. If I ever happen across your friend I'll gladly kill him, so you'll stop running away. Shall lead a quiet, retired life for a spell till the clouds blow away. We both will always remember you two. Jeffry, the Princess says she will write a line. Always faithfully,
>
> B. McG.

Beneath it, in a childish scrawl, were the words:

> Jeffry, I'm going away to be made into a grand lady. You won't know me if we ever meet again. I shall always keep your books.
>
> POLLY McG.

This unexpected disappearance of our friends made me feel very lonely. I decided to write no message. Margy was devoted and intelligent. I must depend on her for the delivery of the written word. A word of mouth message could not be lost and would reach them as surely as a letter. McGin must have had an inkling of his danger to have gone into hiding. Where he had gone to I could not guess unless it be somewhere in the South Country.

I reduced my warning to as few words as possible and had Margy repeat it until I was satisfied she would not forget. But I had no appetite for her wonderfully cooked food which she persisted in bringing to the table. I had been homesick in the North Country. I was more so now. As I hurried back to town it seemed as if only the view of the river from Nashville, or of the little house at McBee's Ferry, or the Little Tennessee flowing through the gap of the Smoky Mountains, could ease the heartache. Down the path, at the turn toward the town, I glanced back from habit; but there was no red sash, no fiery head of hair, enlivening the doorway.

In town, just as the bell on the tavern roof was stridently calling the hungry to dinner, I was startled by the sight of Coby and Allen. They, with others, were hurrying to the tavern. Only by chance did I escape meeting them. As they disappeared through the doorway I hastened to the creek to hire a man to set me across the river.

CHAPTER VI

WIDE FARING

ON MY return to Vevay we lost no time in securing passage on a Virginia ark, it being agreed we should help work the boat. We could have taken a flat owned by two Massachusetts families, but Greenberry insisted the three of us would be conspicuous in New England company, as the contrast in dress, accent and mannerisms would make us noticeable. There would be no such distinction on the ark, and, also, we would feel we were with our own people.

The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 had thrown open an empire for settlement. The roads to the "West" of that time were flowing roads and as immigration increased a great variety of water-craft was produced to meet the needs of the movers. There had been a time when a log canoe, holding two men, had sufficed. With the lifting of the shadow of the tomahawk from our waters the canoe grew into a pirogue, often fifty feet long and accommodating a family and several tons of merchandise or household goods. Flat-bottomed skiffs served as tenders, and the batteau was an overgrown skiff. Rapidly came the keel-boat, the highest stage of development of the canoe. Eastern keels were quickly copied on the Ohio, and from this type grew the barge, the Ohio packet-boats, and in latter years the canal boat.

But as we cast off from Vevay the flats were the most numerous, and our ark was perhaps the most popular type for long trips. Its sides were vertical and both ends were V-shaped. It was seventy-five feet long and fifteen wide and had a depth of four feet. James Grissom, owner and captain, said the timber in it cost him a hundred dollars and that he would sell it for twenty dollars in New Orleans. There were but four of the Virginians, and once they were satisfied we were honest people they were glad to take us aboard. Grissom planned to travel by night as well as day, whenever possible, and two men were required to handle the forty-foot steering-sweep. A big cargo of liquor and miscellany, filled the open part of the boat, with both ends roofed in to accommodate the crew and two fine horses, respectively.

Joel and I took turns at the steering-sweep while Greenberry bustled about with a great show of being about to do something, but never quite reaching the point of execution. After we had been afloat for several hours Grissom told Joel and me:

"Your friend is very active for an old man. If I could harness up all the energy he uses in making false motions I'd make this ark travel upstream. But he's a master hand at talking! He almost made Benson believe whisky ain't good to drink."

While I did not have the river knack, and always would be more at home on a trail than on a boat, I would have found the experience marvelously pleasing if not for my disturbed state of mind. Our ark was so unwieldy that we floated sidewise at times, and occasionally what had been the bow became the stern. This happy-go-lucky mode of traveling tended to make one accept life as he found it, and helped to dull the edge of my nervous fears. If we grounded, or nosed into the bank it didn't matter much: our timbers were stout.

We made no unnecessary stops as the season was late and the river was beginning to rise and Grissom was anxious to deliver his cargo and return home over the Natchez Trace. Then he would load another boat and make another trip. The two horses were already sold and were to be used in improving the Lower Louisiana strain of the wild stock captured in New Mexico.

Our new friends were honest, substantial men and but little given to the usual river roistering. I expected we would put in at Louisville and had nerved myself against that ordeal after we dropped down to the Falls. I entered the cabin and called Greenberry to me. Joel was at the sweep, to utilize his knowledge of the Indian Shute. To my great relief, we did not make a landing, but took the two miles of rugged water. Greenberry wished to be with the steersmen, but a strange foreboding of danger impelled me to keep him with me under cover. All I could think of was my narrow escape from meeting Coby and Allen as they were entering the Louisville tavern. I explained this to Greenberry; but he scoffed:

"Shucks! They're miles away by now!"

Yet I detained him as we bobbed down the two miles of rapids, and my caution was justified when we floated by Shipping Port and close to the entrance of that fine harbor. As the current here is very sluggish, we moved slowly. Grissom had planned to tie up there for the night, but the recent "rise" already was threatening to overflow the low banks and he called to the steersmen to sheer off. A broadhorn, entirely decked over, and suggesting a gigantic water-beetle with its two oars thrust out, one on each side, was just anchoring or setting forth. Among the several men standing on the deck, or roof, were Coby and Allen. We were close enough for them to have recognized Greenberry and me, and their gaze was fixed steadily on the ark as we lazily floated by. Joel never having seen the officers, could betray no concern. I was in a fine sweat, and Greenberry and I did not leave the cabin until we were several miles below the Port.

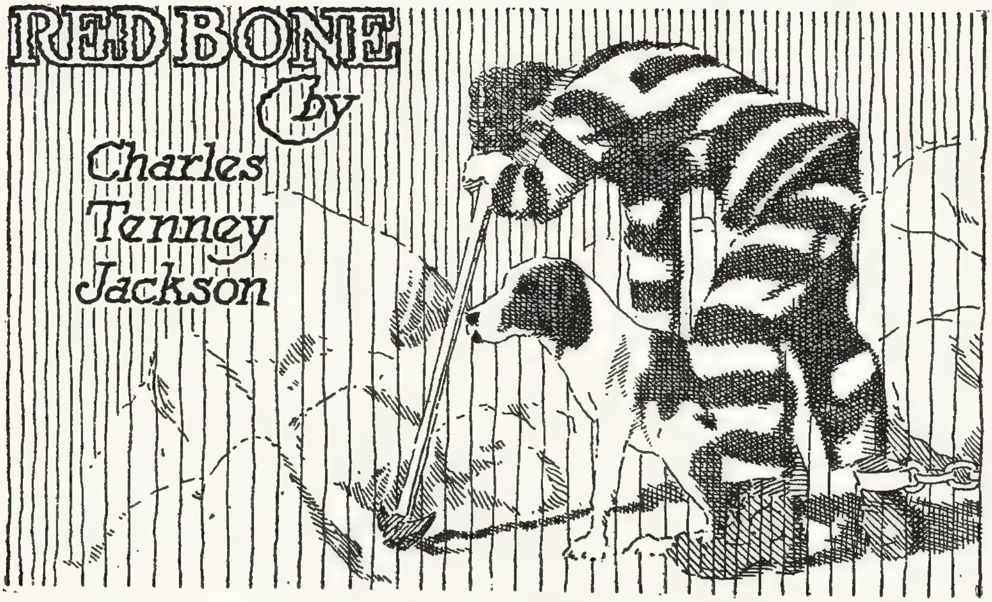
Looking up the river I beheld the usual string of boats, including several broadhorns. On the nearest of the latter a man was playing a fiddle for two men to dance. A drunken fight was in progress on another. On the roof of a third a woman was methodically scrubbing clothes while two children leaned perilously far over the side to stare at the rushing water.

Joel, suspecting no danger, was tranquil, and I warned Greenberry to tell him nothing. I could not help imagining the two officers were on every broadhorn I glimpsed. When we passed Sullivan's Ferry, seven miles from Shipping Port, and were close to the Indiana shore, I wished we could leave the ark and take to the road leading to Post Vincennes. On land, with a decent start, I would laugh at any efforts to overtake me. On the ark I felt thoroughly helpless. We wallowed along in a strong five-mile current and passed a number of new settlements on the Indiana shore, with a string of pleasing hills filling the background. The broadhorns did not gain on us, and by the time we were twenty-five miles below the Falls and passing the two little settlements at the mouth of Salt River, I could see none of them.

TO BE CONTINUED

RED BONE

by Charles Tenney Jackson



Author of "The Watch on the Wine," "Sentimint," etc.

FERRERA, the brown-garbed trusty, led the county dogs on their usual parade past the line of leg-ironed men along the face of the quarry, it being a theory of the convict camp boss that "keepin' in the wind o' the gang" had a fine disciplinary effect on both the hounds and the hunted.

Old lean gray Skidder heading the leashed trio. The famous Skidder, a mean man-jumpin' hound, this Skidder. And just behind the smallest of the double-shackle prisoners in their grotesque stripes of faded blue and gray, Skidder paused.

Young Dave Macklin, aged nineteen, county contract prisoner No. 256, doing twelve months' hard labor after he had been picked up on the Carolina highway with six two-quart fruit jars of mountain corn liquor, grinned back with his dust-caked lips. He shifted an iron-cuffed leg back as far as his hobble chain would allow as if to tantalize the gray-jowled Skidder.

Then Dave heard the crunch of a gun butt as Pinski, the fat guard, noticed this pause in the line of men slogging the broken rock with pick and shovel into the dump cars.

"Here, you—Macklin! Buck up. Quit devilin' 'at hound!"

Young Dave's cold blue eyes fixed in a killing menace on the half-bred bloodhound. If it wasn't for Skidder, Dave would have been home long months ago. Up beyond the foothills, far up over the last mighty barrier of the Smokies piled ridge on ridge within sight of the stinking work camp where Dave slaved.

Three times Dave had done a getaway, and three times old Skidder had treed the fugitive within eight miles of the quarry. That was why now little Dave was in the double-shackle gang, the row of prisoners who wore the stapled ankle cuffs. From leg to leg the short chain gave room for swinging a pick but not for a man's stride to the way of freedom. Double-shackle men were worked in chains, they slept, ate and lived in chains, had a barrack to themselves; and day and night were "under the gun," which meant that the guards were instructed to shoot to kill at any break for freedom or insubordination.

"Under the gun," then, Dave worked this morning, and still that hard grin on his dusty face. Only old Cassidy, loading the dump car alongside, knew why. And with the warning uneasiness of a mother hen at the indiscretions of her chick, old Cassidy touched Dave's sleeve.

"Boy, ol' Skidder knows yeh. He's perousin' an' plannin' agin yeh. Yer dawg, now, Dave—this Red Bone—look out—"

Dave felt the brush of something across

his rawhide shoe. There, astride of his leg chain in the gritty dust, the young starved vagrant of the camp had arisen. Gaunt and trembling, the Red Bone hound faced the county dogs who arose furiously on their leashes. The quarry rang with their clamor. And up on the quarry crusher-frame the work boss cursed at the trusty who had them in charge. The shotgun guard muttered for Ferrera to be on his way. The boss was short-tempered today. Saturday afternoon, and he wanted to shoot the last dynamite charge on the quarry face and be off on his way to town for the night.

Ferrera dragged the three hounds onward. And Dave cautiously shoved the free dog aside till it slunk back to the weeds by the crusher frame. Pinski glowered silently at them both.

The double-shackle gang fell to the work again. A grunt, a mutter here and there. Old Cassidy began his twitching whisper.

"Now, Dave, boy—yeh be ready when the shot goes. If yeh make the run-out this time an' git home, tell 'em—tell my folks—"

"You take care o' this houn' dawg," murmured Dave. "I leave him with you, Dad. Mountain dawg, a Red Bone. I'd give a pretty to have him up in back when the young squirrels are fitten to shoot."

Old Cassidy writhed with impatience. Cassidy had planned this getaway for young Dave Macklin. Cassidy, by ways unknown, had come into possession of the thin file with which young Dave, in the barracks last night, had cut the link of his leg chain till it was no more than a film of metal ready to break at the right moment. Old Cassidy, worn and tired, would not try escape. He too was from the high country back up behind that blue barrier to the west; but the man who could make to it must have youth and courage before the hounds and deputies. No, Cassidy would bide his sentence.

He wiped his sweat-grimed brows in the quarry dust. It was plumb fool talk, this about the starveling stray of the camp. Only Dave had taken it in last week, fed it scraps, sneaked it into the barrack, comforted it beneath his grimy blankets on the plank bunk, soothed it with mountain talk. A mountain dog. A hound for the hills. High country. Free men. When Pinski, the guard, had viciously swung his gun butt against the stray hound's hip yesterday, little Dave had come as close to death as his chain would allow. He did not leap upon the guard because he couldn't. All he could do was to bind the dog's wound with dirty rags, smuggle it to his bunk, stealthily keep it out of the track of the county pack as far as might be. Cassidy had been troubled.

A good dog, the Red Bone, but would Dave Macklin endanger his chance at freedom because he loved the friendless stray? The county pack hated the free brute. Well-fed but leashed in their kennel, they howled this hate at the sneaking outcast about the kitchen buckets. Sooner or later the end would come when the grinning guards loosed Skidder to throttle him.

"Git down, dawg," Dave whispered, and slogged his pick in the stolid line. "Wait for me yander—"

All the day's work it would watch him from the dusty weed shelter under the crusher frame, its deepset eyes patient, melancholy; its high narrow skull and pendent ears, clean limbs and gaunt belly speaking to him of the hills and freedom. If only it would quit this corrupting camp where it slunk degraded and ashamed, Dave thought. Freedom—that finest thing a man or brute can know!

UP THERE in the thickety country men were free. And dogs. Even now, this day when he would break again for it, Dave's eyes went from the sore-hipped brute to the high far ranges. Across the dusty trees fringing the creek back of the quarry road began the well kept lands of the Country Club. From here he could see the white-pillared building and men and women, tiny figures knocking a little ball about over level green. And back of these the foothills. There the trails began leading over ridges and into misty blue gulfs to the high mountain. Over that was Lost Cove in whose wilderness miles were the scattered cabins of Dave's kinsfolk beyond Rebel Flats. There the last red clay road ended. Down from there young Dave had come with the white mountain corn that unlucky day when the deputies picked him up on his way to the Country Club where a respectable realtor was wont to boast to visiting golfers that nothing out of Glenlivet could equal the pure corn mash and spring water liquor that mountain blockaders stilled in the hidden laurel coves.

Out of luck, that was all. Young Dave

did not offer excuse. But the lowland magistrates were testy about this business, and the law had happily decided that the way to stop it was to waylay the mountain men on the hill trails and never meddle with the parked cars or peer into lockers at the Country Club. There was a world of difference between a country club and a country boy.

The Macklins blamed nobody. Up there reigned rebel law and grim freedom. Dying clans of Colonial Scots and Saxons, these Macklins, Warrens, Percys, Johnstons—the Peaceful O'Kellys and the Fightin' O'Kellys. From their generations had come men who gathered in the Carolina lowlands to strike the first blow against alien law and impost at Mecklenberg and to drive the British from the Piedmont to the sea. Then back to the lost provinces with their long rifles and pidgins of strong drink, to be all but forgotten as the frontiers of America swept by a century to the West.

And of it all little Dave Macklin knew not so much as the Second Reader could teach—but he knew that lowland law was an alien thing, and its shackles a trial but no disgrace. Therefore his three futile trys at a getaway. For a Macklin to serve out his time supinely would be the disgrace of it.

There would be laughter when he came to Rebel Flats clanking a broken leg chain. There would be a hide-out in the laurel and armed kinsmen to parley with the law. High country. Free men. In that barrier land free dogs trailed the free deer. Of a frosty morning you could hear the deep baying. A Macklin would pause in his corn patch listening, staring at the heights.

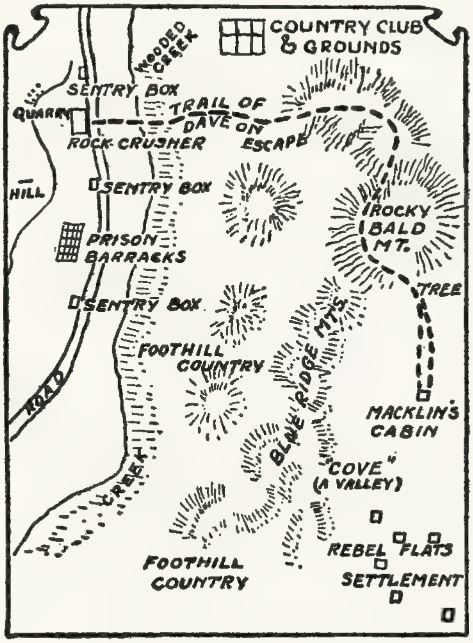
So now, when old Cassidy touched his arm as the chain gang paused at an order from the quarry boss, Dave was thinking of the crippled hound.

"He'll come sneakin' in tonight, and I won't be there. I'll be gone somewheres and Red Bone—"

He wondered. Somewhere—shambling along in the foothills, carrying his broken chain, or a heap of dirty cloth riddled by buckshot and torn by the dogs' teeth over on the Country Club grounds. Yes, this time he would not be brought back. Three times he had tried and failed—they'd shoot to kill this trip!

"Sneakin' into the bunk and I won't be there—"

Old Cassidy turned to him wearily in the line. Up on the rock crusher-frame the boss was yelling at the drillers climbing down from the quarry face. The other gangs who wore no shackles had all left the dump. The guards on the road beyond the stolid groups were watching the laggard dynamite men. Pinski, who had charge of the double-shackle dozen, came swaggering along, his .38 swinging in its shoulder case as he yelled at them.



"Get back, you clinkers! Fergy's goin' to shoot it. You—Macklin, shove that car along an' git off the dump."

And old Cassidy nodded under his rock-grimed brows to little Dave Macklin. This was the big moment to which they had planned. Once in the barracks of nights there was no hope of escape. It had to be done now when the eyes of every one were on the blast which would be fired from a switch at the end of the cut.

Dave nodded to old Cassidy. Cassidy would aid if need be. Cassidy would throw a fit there by the crusher frame to fix the guards' attention on him for the needed moment of Dave's ruse.

So there was no word between them. Dave merely measured with his eye the distance from the crusher to the dusty creek growth.

When the prisoners gathered beside the timbers Cassidy nudged Dave again, his lips hardly moving as he watched the two guards out in the open. The boss turned to the firing switch, and every man of the work force was gazing expectantly up at the quarry face. Old Cassidy shambled before his friend.

Dave took one step back towards the roadside brush. Then he felt something touch his shoe. The young hound had crept there and was licking the prisoner's calloused ankle.

"Red Bone," Dave whispered, "don't start a holler and give me away. There it goes—"

There was a dull thunder, a heave of smashing rock as the shot tore the upper face of the quarry cliff, and then the stuff collapsed, rolling out on the dump under a gray cloud of dust and smoke. And in that slow obscuring haze Dave started.

Not running. They'd have noticed that. He shambled deliberately backward, his eyes fixed on the motionless guards watching the rock fall. Then his gray dusty back crouched under the gray dusty leaves of the alders. A moment more and he was ankle-deep in the branch water. And here he stooped and twisted the filed link against his leg cuff. Then on down the creek bed, holding to the broken chain still fast to his right ankle. Once he stopped as the guards shouted. But it was to order the men back to work. No trusty high up on the rock crusher gave the howl that would start the big gong to ringing which signaled that a convict had escaped.

Dave got to the briar-grown fence that led away toward the foothills. Along this he sneaked, watching the distant golfers now and not looking back to the big dust haze over the quarry.

He made a hundred yards, and then came the long howl of the Red Bone hound.

Dave swore softly. This was a pretty return for his kindness, this stray dog voicing his loneliness as his friend of the camp vanished into the brush! Hunger, death in the end, would be the Red Bone's fate if he continued to hang around this rotten barrack. Sooner or later Skidder, freed of the leash, would throttle the youngster, and the guards would laugh at it.

The runaway came to the concrete highway, and watching closely up and down, he followed it a hundred yards. Cassidy had said that the gas and oil smell of the passing cars would stop the hounds dead on their trail. Only a man in striped clothes could not keep the trail long. At the first sound of a distant motor Dave slunk to the brush, and then gained the outlying spur of the hills.

He breathed easier now but he was not fooled. He might have an hour, two hours, perhaps, before they noticed he was not in the work gang. Certainly, when the prisoners lined up for the march to the barracks at six o'clock the getaway would be discovered. So, on the first red clay trail he hurried. A mile away he could look down over the club grounds, see the pall of dust over the quarry and hear the crusher grinding away.

OVER the first ridge and into virgin timber, and then on a long climb to the second low spur of the Smoky Range. He laughed when he saw the sun level in a gap, and the darkening shadows out over the valley. Check-up time and they hadn't discovered that there were but thirteen men in the double-shackle gang when there should be fourteen! The boss would be roaring at Pinski, the guard. But they didn't know about the broken chain; they would expect to round up a hobbled, desperate prisoner in the first mile of the chase. Little Dave Macklin's sullen breaks for freedom before had been a camp joke.

A killing joke now. A club in his hands and Dave would not tree for the hounds. He'd stand and fight this mean man-jumpin' Skidder dog to the death. And the guards would shoot at this resistance. Well, Dave was not going back. Up here, where his rebel feet clanked along in the brown October leaves, began the first of the high country.

Free country. Back in there kinsfolk and friends. In some lone cabin of the scattered Rebel Flats settlement he'd tell his story and they'd file the iron cuffs from his ankles. His father would hang them above the hickory-pegged slab above the stone-and-clay-chinked fireplace along with that ancient rifle which had come down from the times when his kinsfolk went out to drive Tarleton's redcoats from the Carolina lowlands.

And they'd laugh. How big Dave would laugh when little Dave came home and told how he'd made a fool of the law! The law wouldn't get him again. Up there in the high

Thickety, the law couldn't get a man out of the trackless coves, especially one whose friends were true as Macklin friends would be. Macklins hadn't been in any lawin's with other folks up there. He could hide out a year in the deep laurel with the two Fightin' O'Kellys who did not dare come into the settlement, because of a shooting five years gone and the law never able to put hands on them.

In the dusk he came to the first mighty jut of bald rock on a wooded mountain slope. There he sat down satisfied. Beyond this the balsam began at the four-thousand-foot line; and he knew the obscure trails over the ridges. A cool night wind was on his face as he looked back over the enemies' country. He could see one light in all that lowland night mist.

And little Dave began laughing. This was too easy. Up in this rough homeland they'd have a time chasing him! He had expected to wind and double and confuse his trail on the last rock flats. This dry leafy autumn going would make the hounds slow and careful. They'd have to circle and nose about and more than once fool each other and the pursuing posse. Dave had studied it all out before he left, but now he had come triumphantly to a clear trail without need of delaying ruses.

"Bresh country!" he laughed and swung the loose leg chain against the rock. "'At old Skidder dawg done got fooled somewhere down yander. Now this wind stirrin' the leaves across the Bald, it'll keep him worried when he gets along here."

For he knew, sooner or later, Skidder would be here. Only Skidder would be late. The joke would be on Skidder dawg this time out. Dave would be miles down toward Rebel Flats when Skidder dawg reached the rocky Bald.

So Dave stood up, holding his chain end and laughed. The stars were a great glitter now over the heights. He climbed toward them, crossed another rock flat which opened above a sea of singing balsam plumes, and grinned. This was baffling to any dog—dry rock and drifting leaves. At the edge of the flat he peered off toward the way he had come through the balsam cove.

And then he stopped abruptly. On a whip of the wind up from that piney wilderness he heard a sound, the baying of a bloodhound as it noses fresh trail, the man-smell of the hunted.

Dave's hand tightened on his chain. It came again clearer. The cry had a keen new triumphant note. It meant but one thing to the mountain man—a good trail, a sure follow.

"Been runnin' silent," murmured Dave. "Full o' tricks, that old Skidder dawg. Well, come on, you! You got a chase comin'."

He turned into the dark with a keen measurement of time and distance. No rain for weeks—perhaps he could fool them on the rocks. Double about and jump from crevice to crevice, but then this gave the guards time to overtake the hounds. No, they would expect that. So Dave plunged on into the first laurel thickets on a straight steep descent to a ridge trail which he knew wound about the great cove of the mountain above Rebel Flats.

Laurel is tough going. Its tough, twisting limbs impede a hurrying man. Dave was out of breath when he made the faint leaf-filled trail. When it came into the open he listened again.

He heard them now, nearer. The throaty roar of old Skidder coming up from the dark, and the clamor of Pete and Jerry. And then another note. A sound which made him turn, listening in doubt.

A thin, uncertain yelping faint on the breeze. Dave knew the county pack so well that this puzzled him. The next time the hounds gave voice he discovered that the odd one was nearer to him and far off from the trailing trio. It came again, scared, anxious with a frantic, weary appeal.

"Red Bone—" he whispered slowly. "Trailin' me down—him! Leadin' the county pack on me, he done it. Red Bone—"

He swung off on the trail till it suddenly dipped down sharply through a cleft of the mighty rock ridge. Then he stopped and stared off above the treetops. He saw a light there, far away and below. And Dave watched it with a slow realization of its meaning. The first lonely cabin of the Flats. And off to the left, down the slope of the Cove, he knew his father's clearin' lay hemmed in by the laurel jungle.

Dave had taken the first step down the rocks that way, and then he stopped. A fair trail now, a mountain man's trail, but a short cut back over the ridge and unknown to the law.

It gave the fugitive a queer feeling. He had expected to come down the mountain seven miles down the Cove and across the settlements to big Dave Macklin's place, but he had felt so sure of evading the hounds that the straight climb over the Bald had tempted him. Two miles down there and—home.

Only this would bring the county dogs to his father's doorstep. Clamoring there while the wearied deputies toiled on after the manhunters. Somehow, this hurt—the law at his father's door. Big Dave's cabin folks had never known that. If little Dave had gone around the other way he would have come first upon the clearin's of the Fightin' O'Kellys who would remember the hidden O'Kellys of the high laurel. Murdy O'Kelly would be out gun-shooting the county pack from Dave's weary feet if only Dave had gone that way.

Well, too late now. Only his father was a decent man who kept out of lawin's—as good a man, the preacher had said "as God A'mighty ever shot guts and gear into."

So little Dave stumbled in the dark to a cold rock, and leaned against it perspiring. He hadn't thought—well, there were his brothers, Merle and Sandy, and the two girls, and old Grandma Percy with the ancient pride of the clan Macklin dried to her very bones, all sleeping in the cabin lean-to; and the runaway was bringing the hounds to howl about them. It would not be little Dave in stripes for liquor-totin' that was disgraceful, but the law at the doorstep questioning them.

"Old Skidder, a fightin', follerin' fool," muttered Dave. "Me hid out somewhere but Skidder dawg hollerin' in the clearin'. Folks'd throw it up to the girls at meetin' me bringin' the dawgs home thataway. Red Bone leadin' 'em—Red Bone!"

That hurt, also. He stopped uncertainly when he left the trail. A wild mean spur of the ridge ahead, but it led away from Rebel Flats. If only he had a few hours the start! If only he had food and an hour's rest he could get on up in the high Thickety—they'd have to be men who got him there!

THEN, above the singing balsams, he heard the dogs again. Far, but in a thrilling blood cry of the hunt. Skidder, and then a yelping answer from the starveling Red Bone. Dave grinned—he had to admire it. It was in his blood, bone and blood of all his English forebears—a free dog in free country trailing in cry.

He got up and drew taut his clanking chain. Then he plunged on into the laurel, then the short-growth balsam where winter winds had slanted it so that it lay maddeningly against his face.

When he came to an open space again he could see two thousand feet down to a blue shimmering gulf in which lay Rebel Flats. Only now grim pride was arousing in him. He fought through the balsam again for his chance to the Thickety wilderness above. Red-coated gentlemen have ridden to less chance than that and won—and died.

He couldn't hear the dogs now as he smashed in the laurel prongs, but he was not fooled. That gray, lean devil, Skidder, was coming leisurely, ruthlessly, somewhere through this cold rustle of leaves across the ridge. Trained to come—that was the law. Trained to seek and triumph. You had to admire Skidder dawg.

"I oughtn't to come this way straight in," muttered Dave. "Shucks, I ought to done tried the O'Kellys. Murdy'd help me."

He was crawling under a twist of laurel stubs when the flat rock started under his feet. He went headlong with it into a crevice with the balsam whipping his face. Staring down a sheer wall two hundred feet to the forest tops of the Cove.

Dave was still a moment and then crawled quietly back. It was bad here. He sat up dizzily clearing his eyes. Blood was jetting from his torn cheek. Blood? That was bad! The dogs would howl wilder when they reached this spot where blood was spattered on rock and leaf mould.

So he staggered back up the cleft and listened. He heard the hounds again. It was a glorious burst of hunting brutes on the silent midnight, vibrant as steel, melodious as a 'cello.

Skidder dawg! You grudged and hated, but you had to admire. Skidder, the law! Once, at Burgin's store on the Flats, Dave had seen a picture. It was on a chill tonic advertisement, a great white dome rising above green trees. Little Dave had tried to read the writin' about it, but the storekeeper had to explain that this beautiful white dome above Washington trees was the law. The law—there all things must be pure and all men honest.

Little Dave had admired it. That beautiful white dome, and here, at the end of the trail, the lean gray Skidder closing in. Dave was troubled—but he had kept the law of his clan. He had led the hounds from his father's doorstep. The lowland men down there could not question his close-mouthed people about affairs up-in-back. The ministers of George III would have learned no more if they had asked the mountain Carolinians why they went out to fight for Boston folk who would not pay a tax on tea. Colonial Macklins did not drink tea, but Macklin long rifles had barked against the law in its defence.

It was all a worry to little Dave Macklin, blinking in his leg chains at the end of the trail. In an hour now the law would have him again. Another triumph for the law and Skidder dawg.

Crippled now, dragging his chain worn bright against his scuffed striped clothes, he left a blood taint wherever he turned.

He got to the top of the flat and listened. The hounds were fainter-voiced. They must be circling on the far side.

"Them dawgs a-runnin'—them dawgs a-nosin' where the wind swept them leaves away I tromped on. But—comin'—wonder where Pinski and them gun-toters is at?"

It made him grin again. The fat guard or any of those new strange folks at the quarry camp, in the deep laurel! He grinned, but he knew that the camp boss would have telephoned to the county seat. The sheriff's deputies for this getaway job, yes sir. Lithe, lean men from the mountain townships themselves, whom the Thickety people at least respected. Men who'd have scorned a camp guard's job. Men who knew hounds and hill folks. Even the O'Kellys talked slow and soft when some of those deputies came in to Rebel Flats to loaf around Burgin's store and dawdle about the blockaders' business up in the pathless Thickety.

So Dave went slowly on without further illusions. He just better keep a-goin' and a-goin', checking this dumb panic to turn down to big Dave's cabin and plead for help in the short hour left him. Big Dave might do something. Kinsfolk might get out with surly rifles to parley with the following posse.

But the fugitive kept off the home trail. He shivered in a sweaty chill, and when he wiped his face he knew he was blood-smeared from ear to ear. The county dogs would be wild when they came on his last refuge. It could not be long now. Dave came around a balsam clump on the rocks and then stopped, listening.

Something was near him. He heard again the distant clamor of the hunting pack over the ridge, but this was very near him.

Maybe a deer stirred from the thickets, a mountain cat sneaking from covert. But then Dave saw. The thing was by his feet. Silently weaving around him, the scared bashful abjectness of a dog seeking the touch of a friend.

Dave began to stammer softly. The starved Red Bone hound was licking his iron-bound ankle. It looked up at him with the faintest whine of gladness.

The fugitive bent down to it. This was strange. In camp the outlaw had clamored noisily—and all the night it had been yelping in a sort of lost terror ahead of the county pack.

But now it was stilled at Dave's feet. The grimy bandage with which Dave had tried to bind its wound had become a drag of burrs and dirt. Dave skinned it off the sore, gaunt hip.

"Houn'—" he whispered, "you been draggin' after me? You done come foller me, Red Bone?" Then he laughed and gathered the shivering form. "Houn' dawg—you done bring the pack after me—if old Skidder'd ever took up with you, boy, he'd done tored the throat out o' you."

Houn' dog licked his bloody chin. Houn' dawg cried in his tattered stripes. Dave held it closer and sniffled, mingling his blood with its own opened wound.

"Red Bone, they'll git you. Bleedin' too, and done in— They'll run the trail out yelpin' 'round you before them shotgun folks ever cross the ridge. I can git treed up off 'em, but they'll kill you, Red Bone."

Dave crept to his knees on the windy rock. He tried to reason this out. Red Bone had followed him with the ruthlessness of love, and Skidder had followed Red Bone.

But what a dog, this Red Bone! Lost and sore-hipped, leading the pack!

DAVE watched the vagrant silently. A faint clamor of the manhunters came on the wind, and the Red Bone stirred. It arose and went back on the trail. There, on the first rock jutting up the young dog stopped, pointing intently toward the flat.

The short hair arose across its thin shoulders. A trembling growl, nervous and futile, came from its flecked muzzle.

Dave came near it staring. There, barring the way with a grotesque menace, stood the beggar of the convict camp. Answering the camp hounds who broke to a blazing new triumph as they cleared the distant rock ridge.

"They'd choke the life out o' you, boy. Mean jumpin' dawg, old Skidder. I could fight for you, Red Bone, but they'd pull us both down. You come with me—"

He picked up the shivering hound, wiped his dazed eyes and tried to think. How much time might he have? Then he went on in the cold rustle of the wind across the rock.

For he could think of nothing except the Red Bone. What a dog for Dave Macklin's yard some day! Lean, hard, belly-tight mountain dog, watchful for intruders, guarding the secret ways of mountain folk!

Little Dave laughed softly—

"Him a-leadin' 'at famous old Skidder, bringin' them hounds on me and didn't know!"

So he found the down trail and hurried. In fifteen minutes he was in a frosty corn stubble patch and then a dim wood-lot. The Red Bone's burry ear laid against the bloody gash of his cheek, and the convict chain clanked out behind his foot as he crossed the stones of Dave Macklin's yard. In a great triumph he murmured shyly to the dog in his arms. How come the Red Bone led the long killing chase and crept to him voiceless at the end?

There is a word the silent mountain people rarely utter. Little Dave had never heard it on human tongue except as the preacher used it at meetin'. Even when they marry, mountain folk hesitate to mention it.

So, with his dirty, blood-caked lips to the burry ear, Dave could not stammer that the Red Bone must love him. He just became swiftly cautious when he felt for the worn strap which lifted the wooden bar within and swung open his father's door. Folk at Rebel Flats do not lock their doors against folks who know how to get in. A peace beyond the law is there.

So Dave stilled his chain and stole within. It was all as he expected down to the smallest thing.

The glowing woodcoals on the hearth. The high-posted bed in a red-shadowed corner. His father and two younger brothers were in that great bed under the billows of feather quilts. In the lean-to Grandma Percy and the girls slept in equal oblivion. Above the mantel was the crayon portrait of Dave's dead mother, sold to the clan by the same stranger who sold chill tonic to Burgin's store.

Everything just as Dave knew it would be. Mountain-heavy slumber. Free folk. High country.

Dave crossed to the deerskin rug and put down the dog before the woodfire. He stared at the embers. The Red Bone, too, was strangely comforted. It was as if this was what it should be. A home fire burning. A master with hard fingers to his neck.

But Dave was listening. Then he stole out past the women folks to the shed kitchen. As he guessed, the hawg meat and the brittle cornbread of his forefathers were there abundantly.

He came back and spread the feast and laughed.

"You knowed something?" he whispered. "You're home, boy. You—"

Dave was raising a hunk of grandma's cornbread to his lips when a sound came. He put the bread down and listened—for this he had been waiting. The hound, stretched on the warm deerskin, did not notice. It was chewing starvedly at the hawg meat before the fire glow.

But Dave got up. The chorus of the man-hunting pack was on the ridge above Lost Cove. Turning, circling over the rocks, they had come to that blood trail in the balsam.

Dave came back and reached a hand to the hound chewing on the meat. Twice he patted the ragged coat. Then up again.

"Red Bone, wait fur me. Fur me—houn' dawg—"

The dog did not notice when he closed the door. Nor big Dave, nor the girls, nor any of the sleeping folk. Dave stilled his chain as he crossed the rocky yard. Mounting the worm fence he brushed the crumbs of Macklin bread from his bruised lips.

Then he hurried on past the woodlot, the corn stubble, climbed the first rocks and was in the balsam thickets. There began the trail which led back to the enemies' country.

Half a mile over the ridge he took to a leafless jack oak. Fifteen minutes later the county trio were howling about the tree where a chain dangled from the first limb. Dave became sleepy in the chill and weariness watching the hounds.

It was a magnificent roaring on the high ridge. It set every mountain dog at the scattered lonely cabins of Rebel Flats to distant clamor. Men came to their doors to listen, to wonder, and then quiet their house-yard tumult. Mountain folk do not inquire into what is not their business.

An hour later three tired deputies fought their way to where the satisfied Skidder stood, now and then raising his foam-flecked muzzle to howl his triumph. The close-lipped mountain officers wasted no words. They cursed the county dogs from the tree and told Dave Macklin to come down.

Dave stirred blood-stiffened ankles, and then grinned. Mountain deputies these, and no convict guards. So when he staggered among them and Mel Johnson had to catch him lest he fall, Dave lurched free of them to stand erect and alone.

"Come along," muttered Chief Deputy Dillingham, looking briefly at his .38 and then at the gray of dawn. This was high country. Free men yander over this rock flat.

Dave lifted his chain and followed in the mist.

"Give me your arm, boy," grunted Steve Marsh. "Done in—"

"I ain't done in. It was the blood everywheres that give 'em wind o' me. Skidder's a follerin', fightin' fool, but if I hadn't been headed into strange country, I'd fooled him."

"Yes?" said Johnson. "Strange country? How's big Dave doin' with his hawgs this fall?"

"I don't know nobody around here much. My kin folks live 'way off yander over the next ridge on South Ivy."

So they all grinned and went in silence. By noon Dave Macklin was back in the quarry contractor's camp. He didn't let them see him reel, however, when he sank upon a bench in the office. He merely grinned when the boss questioned him about the filed leg cuff. George III would not have understood Patrick Henry any better.

It was not in reason that a lowland camp guard should. But the three mountain deputies conferred apart a moment, and then the Chief came to County Contract Prisoner, No. 256.

"Dave, what kind o' dawg was that leadin' Skidder all night long? We heard him hollerin', headin' Skidder. The County ought to have a hound like that."

"Red Bone—" muttered Dave carelessly. "A little bitty tramp dawg—the sheriff wouldn't want a dawg that gits himself lost in the Thickety country. He's just done gone—"

His tired eyes wandered to a new calendar above the office desk. The chill tonic man must have been that way, for there was the same beautiful picture which once Dave had seen at Burgin's store in Rebel Flats. Little Dave admired it again—a white splendid dome arising above the leafy green of the Capitol. The throne of law, where all things were pure and all men honest.

But then, with what he could remember of the Second Reader, Dave went to studying the calendar. Three months extra time for this getaway, added to his unfinished stretch—well, let's see, now?

He thought of it awhile, and then slumped back in a great content. In the peace of a great victory. Why, next June!

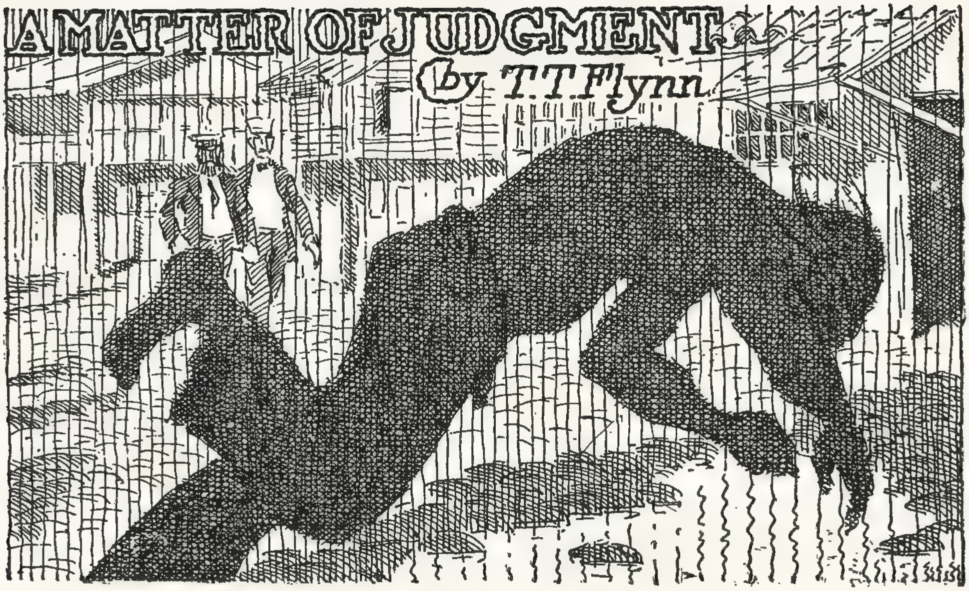
In June the young squirrels are fitten to shoot. And all winter long the houn' dawg would sleep by a warm hearth stone far off from the chill winds that would whip the gritty quarry dust into Dave's face.

And then, too, he had turned the law from his father's door step. So he dozed until they sent him to the double-shackle shed.

The law, indeed, is a very ancient thing past all the statutes, and quite satisfactory if you get the hang of it. Dave felt this virtue when he knew that, come next June, he would be out of the enemies' country to meet his dog as a free man should. Red Bone, himself, would know it as well.

A MATTER OF JUDGMENT

by T. T. Flynn



HIS name was Jeff Smith. How he came to be in that little stifling, stinking, sweltering port on the Burma side of the Bay of Bengal is no part of this story. Sufficient that at one time he had followed the sea. Probably he had lingered too long on a drunken debauch and his ship had left him. At any rate he remained on shore, drinking the cup of native dissipations and vices to the dregs, sinking lower in the scale of decency, shunning the few scattered white men whose trail crossed his until he finally gave up all pretense of being a white man and went native.

It was the nadir of disgrace. There are certain things expected of a white man, more so in those far-flung outposts where his conduct is held up to closer inspection, to more critical criticism than would be the case in his own country.

No man can say what thoughts filled the soul of Jeff Smith in the lucid intervals when even the filthy rot-gut native concoctions were beyond his means and he was forced to remain sober. Whether he regretted his state or gloried in it is not known but gradually there was born in him a hatred of all men and white men in particular. It was unreasonable. Some would say it was due to shame. There are some who would say it was due to an inferiority complex and others who would maintain that it was just natural cussedness. At any rate it was there, festering and growing in the heat, the squalor and the dirt, when his path crossed that of Captain Jeremiah Jones and his life-long friend Chief Engineer James Watts.

The Goddess of Luck is responsible for many queer happenings. There were few more so than the spectacle of Captain Jeremiah and the chief, of Gloucester and other ports of New England, transplanted by circumstances and the fickle goddess to the bridge and the engine room of the *Usada Taung*.

The *Usada Taung* was a leaky, creaky, rusty old tramp, native owned and native manned, picking up an uncertain subsistence in that portion of the world lying around the Bay of Bengal and down through the Straits Settlements and Islands.

Perhaps the owners did not trust one of their blood to handle their boat. Perhaps they were fully aware of the extent of the dilapidation of the *Usada Taung* and counted the extra money for an experienced white captain and chief engineer as a good investment. At any rate she was placed in the hands of Captain Jeremiah and the chief and by dint of much worry, much planning and a great deal of luck they kept her afloat and plying between her ports of call with fair regularity.

It was near the end of their first year on the *Usada Taung* that Jeff Smith intruded into an otherwise ordered existence. The two friends were threading their way through the odoriferous water front section of a squalid little port, where the *Usada Taung*, her hatches securely battened down, awaited the morning tide. The captain wrinkled his nose as a stray puff of the evening air stirred the layers of native odors to more than usual offensiveness.

"Stinkin' hole," he declared in disgust. "I'll be right glad t' get out t' sea again."

The chief spat balefully.

"If berths wa'n't so dern scarce I'd chuck 'er in a minoot," he responded gloomily. "Heath'n owners, heath'n crew and these stinkin' leetle ports. They fair drive me loony."

Captain Jeremiah nodded agreement as he deftly sidestepped a pool of filth.

"Makes you want to get t' a white man's country an' drop anchor fer good."

Of a sudden their conversation was interrupted. The shrill babel issuing from the native dives, lining both sides of the narrow ill-lighted way, was further augmented as a door a few paces before them opened and a figure emerged violently, stumbled and fell in the foul underfooting.

While the captain and the chief stood motionless in surprize the figure scrambled to unsteady feet and filled the air with a stream of lusty English oaths, interlarded with native maledictions. He was answered by a chattering of shrill native invective. The door slammed shut and Captain Jeremiah and the chief were alone for the moment with the man, who stood, swaying slightly, where the momentum of his exit had deposited him.

In the flickering shadows cast by a lone oil lamp he appeared little different from a native; one of the horde that swarmed and wallowed in every vermin-filled corner of the port. He was short and powerful. His face was lined with the marks of many vices. Ragged trousers and a shirt, once light but reduced to a nondescript color by dirt, hung loosely upon him. The matted hair upon his head was devoid of covering. He was shod in worn sandals.

Captain Jeremiah was the first to recover. He stepped forward.

"I say, my man," he asked. "Be you a white man?"

The man started and peered at the captain.

"Blim'ee, I ain't your man," he retorted in a surly voice. "I aint nothin'. Beat it!"

The chief touched the captain's elbow.

"They's nothin' we can do, Cap'n," he said. "He's another one gone native. I hev had dealin's with sech like. They're hopeless. Somethin' gets into 'em an' they sorta let go an' furgit they ever was white."

The man regarded them sullenly from under the outcropping of his matted hair. He swayed drunkenly and, without warning, crumpled to a heap on the ground. A great dark blotch on the side of his leg glistened dully as a feeble ray from the light played upon it.

Captain Jeremiah stooped and brushed his hand over the spot. His fingers, when he held them up, were stained dark.

"I mistrust the man's hurt."

The captain drew forth his knife and slit the ragged trousers over the blotch. The chief struck a match and cupped it over the leg. The light disclosed a long gaping slash, from which the blood oozed steadily.

"Let me hev the loan of your handkerchief," the captain requested.

THE chief fished hastily in his pocket and held the bit of cloth out. Captain Jeremiah drew forth a companion one and knotted the two together. He passed the two about the leg above the slash and, using the knife for a lever, tightened on the crude tourniquet until the flow of blood slackened.

While he worked, several natives slithered out of the darkness and passed into the shadows beyond the light. Further than brief stares they displayed no interest. The door remained tightly closed.

When the bleeding stopped, Captain Jeremiah rose to his feet and, doffing his cap, scratched his head in perplexity. That operation failing to produce a solution he turned to the chief.

"I'm blamed ef I know what t' do with him," he confessed.

The chief shrugged.

"Jest leave him lay. He'll not bleed to death naow an' some one'll pick him up before long."

Captain Jeremiah shook his head.

"He's a right poor catch but he's white. We can't leave him lay around like this. He'll hev a knife betwixt his ribs inside o' thutty minoots, fer the rags he's got on."

"He seemed t' care fer his comp'ny," the chief pointed out.

"I know," Captain Jeremiah admitted. "He's purty fur gone, but he's still a white man. I think I'll take him on board an', when he's able t' be about, put him t' work. It'll be better fer him than rottin' in this —— fersaken place."

He swung the limp figure up in his arms and turned toward the *Usada Taung*. The chief followed with a dubious shake of his head.

In the ghostly light of dawn the *Usada Taung* got under way with little disturbance. An ancient tug crept silently out of the darkness and passed a line over the side. A few brief orders from Captain Jeremiah and the bow and stern lines were cast off from the dock. The tug sprang to life and, following a great jangling of bells in her engine room, forged ahead until the tow line grew taut. Slowly the bow of the *Usada Taung* swung away from the dock. In the stream and clear the tug was cast loose and the ship headed for the open sea under her own power.

The last outpost of land had dwindled to a hazy line and dropped below the horizon when Jeff Smith roused from the deep sleep into which he had fallen without regaining consciousness. He lay for a space, half awake, staring up at the bottom boards of the upper bunk. The regular cadence of the engines finally penetrated his thoughts. He recognized the sound at once and rolled out on the deck with an oath.

He stood balancing to the sway of the ship. Sleep had banished his weakness and, save for a stiffness in the slashed leg, he felt strong. Memory of the preceding night returned and he swore fluently. Finally he stepped out on deck.

He found himself on the after well deck of a small steamer. There were several seamen visible, all Lascars. Disregarding them he made his way to the upper deck. Captain Jeremiah was standing at the rail. He nodded in greeting.

Jeff Smith ignored it. He snarled—

"Who shanghied me on this bloody tub?"

"Nary a one," Captain Jeremiah explained mildly. "I brought ye aboard instid o' leavin' ye in th' gutter t' bleed t' death 'r get yaour throat cut."

"Who asked you to?"

Captain Jeremiah scratched his head.

"Well naow, thet haint th' way t' look at it. Ye was right sickish when we f'und ye an' I hed t' use my own jedgment. I did what I thought best."

"Best me —— eye!" Jeff Smith scowled. "It's nothin' but shanghaiin'."

"What abaout it?"

"What about it?" Jeff Smith lost all caution in his rage. "I'll show you what about it. You an' that other bloke, what thinks he's so much. White men. Bah! I'd ruther be yellow any day. I'll slip a knife into you 'f I can't do nothin' else. S'elp me."

Captain Jeremiah straightened and shook his finger under the man's nose.

"Lissen t' me. I pulled ye aout o' th' gutter where ye belong an' brought ye on my ship. I thought ye wuz a white man. I wuz mistook. You're worse than a heath'n; good comp'ny fer th' dogs in a back country village. I ca'ant put ye off till we make port. Meanwhile ye'll work. Go below an' report t' th' chief engineer."

Jeff Smith choked. His hand slipped to the back of his neck. Before he could withdraw it Captain Jeremiah, suddenly galvanized into action, knocked him down. He bounded up again spitting in fury. Captain Jeremiah, lank and wiry and formidable despite his years, sent him down again and again till he lay helpless.

Panting from his exertions Captain Jeremiah reached down and jerked the ragged shirt open at the neck. He took a sharp knife from a sheath between the man's shoulders.

"H'sh," he said, shaking his head at the knife. "Th' man's loony fer sure." He prodded the prostrate figure with his foot. "It hain't healthy t' use these on th' *Usada Taung*. Still, I wont hold it agin ye. Mebbe when ye ca'am down a grain o' sense'll strike ye'. I'll be ready t' lissen t' anything ye hev t' say if it does. Meanwhile, till I'm convinced I wuz mistook ye'll hev t' obey orders an' get along t' th' chief. I mistrust ye'll find him in th' engine room. Look sharp naow."

Jeff Smith eyed the knife in the skipper's hand. He rose to his feet unsteadily, started to speak and then apparently thinking better of it, turned and went below. He located the chief in the sweltering engine room as the captain had prophesied.

"Skipper said report to you," he mumbled through bruised lips.

The chief eyed the battered features in surprise.

"I mistrusted the skipper wuz mistook," he murmured to himself.

He reached back into his hip pocket and abstracted a huge plug of black tobacco. He bit off a generous corner and masticated it thoughtfully for a few minutes.

"What c'n ye do?" he finally inquired.

Jeff Smith scowled.

"Nothin'," he said.

"Ever do any firing?"

"If I had I wouldn't say so. Here I am. What d' y' want me to do?"

The chief expertly spat through a crack in the deck plates. If the man wouldn't admit he could fire there was no use to try him. Under the guise of ignorance he could do more harm than good.

"I'll put ye t' trimming coal," he finally decided. "Go on the twelve t' four watch. Get a mattress from the stoo'ard an' pick yourself a bunk in the focsle."

From the steward Jeff Smith received a meager pallet of straw which he carried to the after forecastle. It was a dark and fetid hole, reeking with the smell of the Lascar firemen and coal trimmers. It was completely filled with double-decked bunks with bare space between for one man to pass. Part of the bunks were occupied by men on the night watches. Some were asleep and some were chattering in low tones from one bunk to another.

In the semi-gloom of the interior he found an unoccupied bunk. He threw the mattress in and, unmindful of the stares of the Lascars who were awake or the abundant promise of crawling vermin, went to sleep.

Twice during the day he arose, wolfed down the food, brought in tin pans by a dirty mess boy, and sought his bunk once more. At eleven-thirty in the evening, seven bells struck on the bridge. A moment later a Lascar coal trimmer, black with the dust of his work, entered the forecastle and shook the members of the twelve to four watch awake. When they were all roused he went below again.

The men sat up in their bunks and murmured drowsily to each other. Jeff Smith took no part. He slipped on his sandals and stepped out on the deck. There was no moon but the sky was ablaze with stars. The sea was calm and the *Usada Taung* slipped through the water with hardly a perceptible roll.

* * *

HE FASHIONED a cigaret from some scraps of tobacco and a crumpled paper that he fished from a pocket, lit it and leaned over the side, watching the play of phosphorous lights in the wash rolling away from the side of the boat. When the cigaret was consumed to the last possible puff, he flipped the glowing end out into the night and joined the watch in the fireroom.

As he stepped on to the grating over the shaft extending down to the fireroom deep below, the two coal trimmers grinned at each other. Several of the black gang had witnessed the captain's treatment of the stranger, from the poop deck. It was fortune from heaven. Buddha indeed, had smiled upon them, had delivered them into ease. Here was one to share a third, nay a half of their labor.

Eight bells sounded from the bridge and the men dropped down the steel ladders to the dim, oven like fireroom. With scarcely a word to the departing watch they began their work. After a scrutiny of the fires in his respective boiler, each fireman seized a rake and began to clean the dirtiest one.

The glowing clinkers streamed in sparkling cascades down upon the steel plates of the fireroom deck. One of the coal trimmers filled a bucket with sea water from a tap and held it out to the stranger. With gestures he made it clear that the water was to be poured over the red hot coals, gathering at the feet of each fireman. Meanwhile, he and the other trimmer would go into the bunkers and begin their work.

Jeff Smith accepted the bucket and, without speaking, emptied it over the other's head. He dropped the empty bucket, walked to the bunker ladder, mounted it and disappeared through the bunker door, leaving the two trimmers to do their work as usual. In the bunker he scooped a hole in a bank of slack coal and made himself at ease during the entire watch, oblivious of the black glances from the two sweating trimmers who worked near him.

Day after day the *Usada Taung* plowed steadily on her course. Each day was a repetition of the one before. The gray dawn merged into the sunrise, the first rays stealing up over the horizon in blazing bands of gold, imperceptibly intensifying until they centered in the first flashing edge of the sun disk. The glassy calm, so common in the before dawn quiet, stirred to ripples and finally to dancing wavelets as the breeze freshened for the day.

Little schools of flying fish burst from the water and sailed away on either side, skittering into a final slump and disappearance. Now and then a group of porpoises accompanied the ship, rising and submerging in endless undulations. At times they paced her even progress, drifting in against the side as though the contact gave them exceeding pleasure. The creamy wake stretched endlessly back through the wastes of water.

It was hot during the day, an inferno such as only the blistering heat of a tropical sun beating down on steel deck plates could produce. Awnings were rigged and additional canvas ventilators stretched to catch all the air possible for the suffering men in the engine room and fireroom. Below, the heat was so intense that the tough Lascars wilted; man after man collapsed or writhed in the grip of the deadly stomach cramps.

With the evening, however, with the dipping of the great ball of fire over the horizon, came relief, blessed cooling relief that brought all hands, not on duty, on deck for the rest of the waking hours. Some gathered on the forecastle head and plunked weird strains from native instruments. Some gathered on the poop deck and gambled, their shrill clamor rising in opposition to the music forward.

Always, Jeff Smith sat apart from the rest of the crew, alone. He was unchanged. His attire continued to be of the same degree and color. His forehead was still shaded by the matted hair. His face was still marked by the same sullenness, the same bitterness that had tinged it when he rejected the overtures of the captain ashore.

Nothing was known about him, save that he was an old hand aboard ship. Once, in the fireroom, in a burst of temper, he jerked a shovel from the hands of a slovenly fireman and showed him how to place the coal right. In the engine room, on an errand, he stepped close to the engine and involuntarily his hand flashed out to meet a great revolving crank web, slipped down inside and touched the bearing as only an expert could. For a moment there was a contented look on his face and then it passed. He turned and slouched back into the fireroom.

His behavior irritated Captain Jeremiah.

" 'Tain't thet I care what he thinks or does," he confided to the chief, as they paced the bridge together. " 'S jest that I hate t' see a man make sech a fool outa hisself."

"I knew ye was mistook," said the chief pessimistically. "When a man gets to trapsin' 'round with the heath'ns an' tryin' t' make one outa hisself, an' sech like, 's time t' leave him be. Leastways thets what I think."

"Mebbe so, mebbe so," admitted the skipper. "But the's times we're all mistook in our jedgments. I'm most willing t' admit I was."

As the days passed it looked as though the chief was right. Jeff Smith continued to live with the Lascars. He never by word or sign betrayed the fact that two men of his own kind were near him.

The *Usada Taung* ran down the Strait of Malacca, passed through Singapore Strait and pointed her nose out into the South China Sea. Captain Jeremiah chose the outside passage. They had passed between Boong Ouran and Soube Islands when the chief slipped on the engine-room ladder and sprained his ankle. It was a bad sprain. He swore with clenched teeth while the assistant and the oiler boosted him up to the deck and helped him to his quarters.

The oiler went for the skipper. By the time he arrived, the foot had swollen so much that the shoe would not come off. The chief eyed the captain mournfully between winces of pain as he opened his knife and ruthlessly slashed down the side of the shoe.

"——," he said sorrowfully. "It's the last pair."

"Jest keep ca'am," comforted the skipper soothingly. "Ye won't have occasion t' use 'em afore ye make port. It's the flat o' your back the rest o' the trip. These sprains an' sech like are the very devil."

"So I jedge." the chief gasped as the captain massaged the ankle. Sweat started to his forehead with the pain.

Captain Jeremiah was correct. The ankle was in bad shape. The chief was confined to his bunk. He lay in his stuffy cabin and fervently cursed the heat and the ship and the pain in his ankle and life in general. Also he worried about the engine room. He had never been fully convinced that a heath'n engineer was fit to be trusted with the engines. He pestered the captain for information and seemed almost disappointed when the skipper assured him that everything was proceeding as it should.

THE *Usada Taung* was well out in the South China Sea when the glass began to fall. Captain Jeremiah watched it carefully. The sun was shining brightly but when it continued to drop he ordered storm lashings placed on every movable thing on deck.

The glass continued to fall steadily. In the afternoon the descending sun slipped into a faint haze through which it shone red and malignant. The haze gradually thickened and became perceptibly nearer. The slight breeze vanished entirely and the *Usada Taung* drove through sluggish oily swells. A great stillness settled over everything. The air became sultry, oppressive and difficult to breathe.

Captain Jeremiah paced the bridge restlessly, watching the horizon and the thickening haze. Once he halted in mid-stride and sought the chief in his room.

"How's her machinery?" he asked, after he had informed the chief of the way the weather was shaping up. "Will it hold up all right?"

The chief shook his head gloomily.

"It may an' it mayn't. No one can tell what this boat's gonna do," he answered. "Things below are as good as I c'n make 'em. If those heath'n act sens'ble I allow they's no danger."

The captain returned to the bridge with a half frown on his face. The *Usada Taung* was old and in no condition to stand a heavy buffeting. Still, there was nothing to do but make the best of the situation.

Late in the afternoon a black cloud bank appeared, low on the horizon. It mounted and grew in size. A thin white line of white-caps sprang up before it. They swept nearer. With eerie suddenness there was a raising shriek and the storm was on them. It came so swiftly that even the first spasmodic white-caps were outdistanced by the advance blast.

The *Usada Taung* faltered and heeled to the onslaught.

"Port your helm!" Captain Jeremiah roared through the pilot house door at the quartermaster. "Hard over an' then ease 'er up!" Caught by her rudder the *Usada Taung* swerved and headed into the gale.

The first whistling blasts rose to a steady scream as the wind raged about the ship. The oily swells were quickly whipped into white caps which were as quickly ripped off and blasted into spray.

In a short time the *Usada Taung* was mounting waves which continually grew higher. Darkness blanketed a scene of indescribable fury. Great waves marched across a waste of waters. They rose up, seemingly to the very sky, and the wind tore the crests and drove them, flying tons of spray, into the vast hollow valleys between.

The *Usada Taung* labored to hold her own. A giant wave would tower far above her, dwarfing her to a cockle-shell, threatening annihilation. Then, her bow lifting, she would mount up and up. For an instant she would hang at the top, then her bow would slowly tip and she would plunge down a great slope, and bury her bow under countless tons of water at the bottom. Slowly, heavily she would lift, water streaming from scupper pipes and pouring from her well decks, lift to meet yet another onslaught that at times stopped her dead in her course, quivering like a stricken being.

Below, in the stifling fireroom and engine room, the beat of the waters against the sides, the sounds of the racing engine as the propeller lifted out of the water, the protests of the straining ship, merged into an even monotone.

Hour after hour the force of the wind increased. At midnight the twelve to four watch took over the ship. Jeff Smith looked at his companions as they dropped down upon the fireroom plates. He sneered at what he saw. They were nervous. Their minds were on the storm instead of their work. Each time the *Usada Taung* quivered from an excessive blow they looked at one another and eyed the ladder leading to the deck.

Jeff Smith picked up the water bucket and waved the two trimmers to the bunkers. He took his stand by the water tap where he had the whole of the fireroom under his eyes. Before the fires were cleaned one of the firemen became violently seasick from the heat and the gas fumes rising from the mound of fire at his feet. He dropped his rake clattering on the deck plates and collapsed on a heap of coal.

Jeff Smith threw his bucket aside with a muttered curse. He went to the man and tried to drive him back to his work. The Lascar moaned and refused to rise. Finally, Jeff Smith shrugged his shoulders, aimed a hearty kick at the man and picked up the fallen rake.

Swiftly and expertly he finished cleaning the fire. He took the man's shovel and coaled his other fires. He worked with the ease of long experience. A half turn around and he drove the shovel deep into the bank of coal at the mouth of a bunker chute. He pulled it to him, heaped high, grasped it lower down with his other hand and, turning, lifted it in a long true curve up into the roaring maw of the fire. Well inside the fire door he checked it; the coal slid off the end and spread evenly over the bed of fire. With a flirt he withdrew the shovel and held it before his face for an instant as a shield from the burst of flame that at times billowed out several feet when the fine coal dust exploded in the fiery depths.

AS HE became absorbed in his task the sullen look disappeared from his face. He became alive and eager. In the terrific heat of the fireroom the sweat poured forth until his rags clung to his body and his naked legs and arms and chest glistened in the dancing lights from the roaring fires.

The steel plates under foot canted at alarming angles. He moved about on them lightly and surely. With seemingly effortless movements he picked up the great steel slice-bar and drove it back into the fire, back until the hairs on his arm shriveled in the heat. Savagely he bore down on the end, and pulled it forth and drove it back again. It was as though in the fires he was fighting the black mood that had been with him so long.

When he had the fires in good condition Jeff Smith was gasping from the unaccustomed labor. But, there was a new air about him. It was as though the streams of sweat had carried away an inner coating of dirt. He seemed another man.

He dropped the glowing slice-bar on the plates and went through the bulk head door into the engine room. Abdul Bawla, the assistant engineer stood at the throttle, moving it up and down as the screw lifted from the water. He was plainly nervous. His hand, when he lifted it to his cigaret, shook. Jeff Smith eyed him for a moment and then spat disdainfully.

He swept the engine room with a practised eye. The machinery seemed in good order. The great triple expansion engine was turning steadily. It accelerated and slowed rhythmically, as the stern lifted and settled. He moved back of the engine. The bilge pumps were working. The rotten hull, strained by the fury of the waves, was making water. He stared at the pumps thoughtfully. They were old. They labored fitfully and heavily. Spurts of steam escaped through the packing and writhed into invisibility in the current of air from a near-by ventilator. It was clear that very little would be needed to put them out of commission. With a dubious shake of his head, he went back to his fires.

The wild sounds of the gale, the crashing of the seas against the sides, the shivering and groaning of the buffeted ship, were beginning to affect the Lascars. They were uneasy, half afraid. Finally, they dropped their tools and drew together talking excidedly and glancing repeatedly at the ladder leading to the upper deck.

Jeff Smith jerked the great red-hot bar from a fire and swung the door to with a crash. He skimmed the sweat from his brow and peered at the steam gauge. The hand had dropped back from the red mark of full pressure.

With a frown he turned and saw the men idling while their fires died. Wrath blazed across his face. He stooped, picked up the slice-bar and charged at them, bellowing curses in English and bits of dialect. With horrible grimaces he threatened to drive the red hot point through the first man who stopped work or attempted to leave the fireroom.

The Lascars broke before the half naked, sweat-glistened white man with his great red-tipped bar. They jumped to their work. But they were more uneasy and, as the *Usada Taung* rolled farther and pitched more violently, they cast anxious glances at the ladder.

The sloshing of water in the bilges grew more audible as it dashed to and fro with the rolling and plunging of the ship. Finally the *Usada Taung* rolled a little deeper than usual. A froth of dirty water edged up between the deck plates on the starboard side.

Soon it was evident that something was wrong. The water gradually rose until the plates were covered with a black greasy film that sluiced to one side and then the other as the *Usada Taung* rolled.

The Lascars fast became useless in their terror. Jeff Smith lashed them with jeers, with taunts and curses. At last he became helpless. Their fear of him was exceeded by the fear of the black, greasy water dashing about their feet. It presaged a horrible death if the boat foundered and they were trapped below.

The sick man edged over until he was at the foot of the ladder. Seizing an opportune moment he scaled it rapidly. He was followed at short intervals by the others.

Jeff Smith accepted the inevitable with a shrug. He filled each of the fires heavily with coal and went into the engine room.

He stopped by the throttle and peered about the crowded, machinery-filled space. No one was visible. The engine was turning steadily, the pumps were working, the dynamo was humming as usual. There was something ominous in the sight of all the machinery running with no human hand to control it.

He glanced into the small machine shop. It was empty. He went aft to the shaft alley but stopped by the thrust bearing. The water in the alley was already up to a man's waist. No need to look there.

On a sudden thought he stepped across the thrust bearing and passed back of the engine to the bilge pumps. They were working at full speed. Indeed they were working too fast. He stooped and turned on the cock in the discharge pipe. Only a feeble stream trickled forth.

The trouble was plain at once. Once in the North Atlantic the same thing had happened on another ship. The water in the dirty bilges, agitated by the deep rolling, had become a soup of thick oil, bits of waste, coal and other refuse. Enough of the mess had finally worked into the intake strainers of the pumps to clog them up. Abdul Bawla, kin to his mates in the fireroom, despite a veneer of learning, had probably given away to the first onslaught of panic and made for the deck followed by the oiler.

Jeff Smith looked at the racing pumps and anathematised Abdul Bawla, his ancestors and his descendants for a thousand years in the past and in the future. As he swore heartily his mind flashed over the situation. The chief was confined to his room with small chance of the fear-stricken crew notifying him. They would be making preparations to leave the ship.

The *Usada Taung* was in real danger. She was gradually filling with water. Her fires were fast dying down. In a short time the water would reach the low fires and put them out. The steam would fall, the engines stop, they would wallow helplessly for a space and finally founder.

Jeff Smith squared his shoulders and took a deep breath. If possible, he was more ragged and dirty than the day he came aboard the ship. He still looked forth from under the shock of matted hair, but there was a difference. His glance was full of sullen hatred no longer. It was keen and quick and alive. It spoke of great changes that had occurred inside.

Leaning to the heavy roll, he strode to the speaking tube and blew a mighty blast through it. In a moment Captain Jeremiah's voice answered from the bridge, muffled by the tube and the chaos at the other end.

Jeff Smith tersely informed him of the situation.

"Get some men down here to keep up steam an' I'll fix the pumps," he promised.

He turned away from the tube, thinking hard. There was more than one way to proceed. He could take the risk of clogging the condenser by letting the circulating pump draw on the mess in the bilges, or he could clean the choked strainers.

He chose the strainers.

The time was short. Already the water was half an inch deep on the engine room plates. The engine pits were filled, and, as each crank web swept down into its pit, a sheet of water dashed in every direction.

Jeff Smith stopped in front of the pumps, stooped, seized a plate by one side and sent it clanging over backward with a heave. A square of dark water was exposed. It heaved and sucked and burst out in small geysers as the *Usada Taung* rolled. The black water swirled and clutched at his feet, as though to drag him from his footing.

MOVING swiftly, yet surely, he sat down on the edge and lowered himself until his feet touched the bilge bottom. A last look at the intake pipe of the pumps, several deep breaths, and he was under the surface.

The next half hour Jeff Smith lived in a haze of rainbow-colored lights, of moments of blackness and blind groping under the surface, of strained lungs, of thumps and bruises over his entire body and a constant sickening taste of oil and salt water in his mouth.

His hands were torn and bleeding from clawing at the strainers. There was a gash on the top of his head, somewhere under the matted hair. He was weak, so weak that he had difficulty in holding himself upright during the breathing spells.

He had been swept about in the bilges by the rush of water, hurled against pipes, smashed against braces, caught in the pipes on the bottom and half drowned. All thoughts of time disappeared. For ages he struggled and groped and gasped for breath and repeated the round when his lungs were once more filled with the hot steaming air of the engine room.

When he finally finished and hung weakly across the edge, he could hardly see. His head and body were covered with the thick bilge muck. Inside, his heart throbbed and pounded from his exertions, but it drove streams of pure contentment through his veins. He was happy. The strainers were clear, or nearly so. The pumps were laboring heavily and already the water was beginning to recede.

As he rested, the clang of shovels came faintly from the fireroom. And supporting it, carrying even through the engine room noises, boomed a steady stream of pure wholesome swearing, gathered from the seven seas; rich, full-flavored and potent.

Jeff Smith raised himself out of the water and stood upright. He wiped the oil and water from his eyes and peered in the direction of the voice. And then he grinned.

Seated on a box at the entrance between the fireroom and engine room, where he could command the fireroom ladder and the engine room ladder, was the chief. His injured ankle was resting on a mound of waste. In his hand was a blue-barreled automatic.

He was addressing his words impartially to the fireroom watch and a thoroughly crushed Abdul Bawla. A menacing flourish of the automatic every few words lent additional emphasis to his remarks.

Jeff Smith walked rather weakly toward him.

The chief saw him and broke off in the middle of a sentence. He surveyed the ragged, blackened wreck that halted in front of him. His jaws worked agitatedly and he aimed a stream of tobacco juice aside to cover his embarrassment.

"I wuz mistook," he said finally. "I wuz mistook in my jedgment. I take off my hat t' you. Ye are a real man."

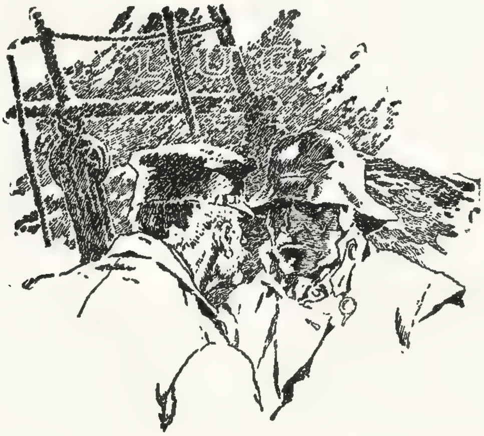
Jeff Smith peered intently at the chief, and, when he saw the words were genuine, he flushed beneath the blackness on his face. He shook his head.

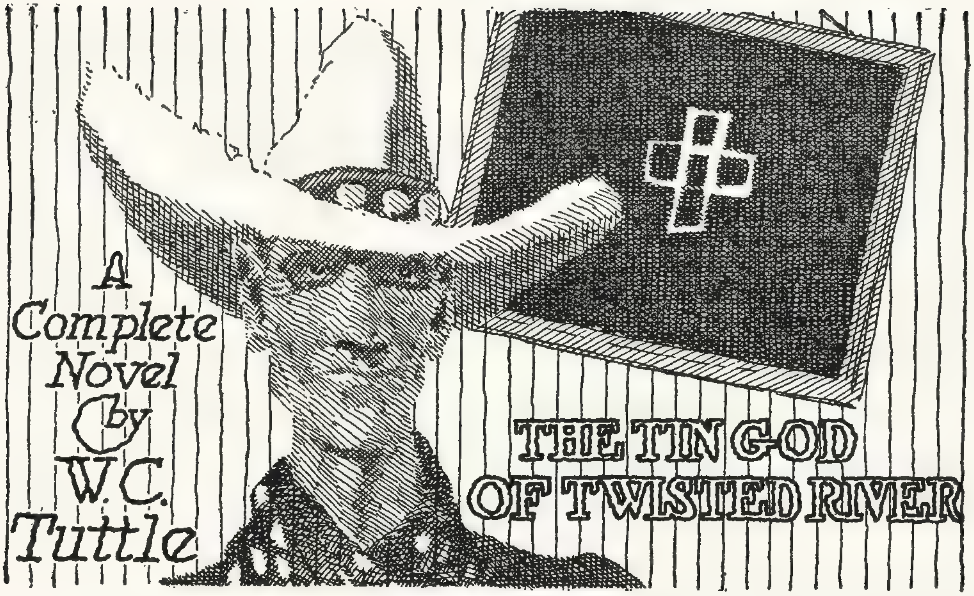
"Nothin' to it," he disclaimed gruffly. "Any bloke could ha' done it."

He glanced through the bulkhead door into the fireroom and then looked back at the chief.

"They's times," he said finally. "They's times we white men have got to stick together."

And the chief nodded assent.





THE TIN GOD OF TWISTED RIVER

A Complete Novel By W. C. Tuttle

Author of "Hidden Blood," "The Lovable Liar," etc.

THE little cow town of Calumet drowsed beneath a summer sun; a peaceful little village of false-fronted, unpainted, frame buildings, many hitch-racks, sparsely populated with nodding saddle horses, and little ambition to be anything but a cow town.

The streets were narrow, dusty, the sidewalks of warped boards clattered like unmusical xylophones beneath the tread of the booted cowboys, most of whom had draped themselves ungracefully in tilted chairs in front of the Ten Bar saloon.

It was shady in front of the Ten Bar, and there was always a possibility of somebody inviting them to have a drink. From the open door of the saloon came the cool odors of stale beer, the voices of a couple of seven-up players arguing over whether it was ethical or not for a man to turn three jacks in one game.

Two riders appeared at the north end of the street coming into town, their tired horses poking through the dust, shuffling wearily. The leading rider was well over six feet tall, bronzed and gaunt, his wrinkled shirt-tail flapping in the vagrant breeze, attesting to the fact that he had been long in the saddle and had hunched his shoulders many times.

The face beneath his big sombrero was thin, bony, heavily lined. The nose was generous, the mouth wide, serious; the eyes set in a mass of grin wrinkles which belied the seriousness of the rest of his face.

The other cowboy was of medium build, bow-legged enough to fit a horse perfectly, and with a great breadth of shoulder. His face was as bronzed as that of his companion. Perhaps his features were a trifle more regular, just as serious, and his wide blue eyes with their innocent expression were out of accord with the rest of the man.

Their raiment was nondescript. The wind and dust of the dim trails had scoured and faded all the color from their shirts, their bat-winged chaps were worn and wrinkled, and their sombreros were flopping and shapeless.

Their arrival caused the siesta-loving cowboys to lift their weary heads and give a little heed to the new arrivals. One of the cowboys tilted forward, the front legs of his chair clattering to the sidewalk.

"I'll be a derned liar, if it ain't 'Hashknife' Hartley and 'Sleepy' Stevens!" he exclaimed. He got to his feet and leaned against a porch post.

"Yee-e-e-e- o-o-ow! Cowboys in town!" he yelped.

Hashknife Hartley's lips twisted in a wide smile, as he swung his horse up to a hitch-rack, threw one of his long legs in a sweeping curve, almost hitting Sleepy

Stevens who had ridden in close beside him.

He whipped his tie rope around the top pole of the rack, jerked the knot tight, yawned widely and walked stiff-legged toward the Ten Bar saloon with Sleepy, the bow-legged one, following.

"Hyah, Hashknife," greeted one of the cowboys, while the rest of them grinned widely and got to their feet.

"H'lo, Eddie, yuh old son of a gun! How are yuh, Omaha. By golly, if there ain't ol' Pep'mint!"

They shook hands violently with Hashknife and fell upon Sleepy, *en masse*, while he blinked at them vacantly and begged Hashknife to introduce him.

"They're yore friends, Hashknife. Make me used to 'em."

"Same old frozen-faced son of a gun, eh?" laughed one of the boys, slapping Sleepy on the back.

"My ——, yore etiquette is plumb homemade," said Sleepy indignantly. "Oh, well, I'll shake hands with yuh, but you'll excuse me if I don't call yuh by name. He-e-ey! What in —— do yuh think my hand is, anyway? Think it's a fringed decoration I'm wearin' on the end of my arm? Yo're goshawful vociferous for strangers."

Sleepy flexed his fingers and glared at them. Slowly a smile spread across his face as he looked at each in turn.

"I've met you boys somewheres, ain't I?" he asked.

"We ain't never been nowhere," denied Peppermint Poole.

"No," Sleepy shook his head slowly, "I'm wrong. Thought for a minute I knowed yuh, but yore faces looked kinda familiar. Lemme see." Sleepy squinted thoughtfully for a moment. Then, "Aw, I know now. I seen some pictures in a Sheep-Dip ad, and they looked so much like you gents—you'll pardon me, I'm sure."

One of the cowboys made a dash at Sleepy, who eluded him and went in the saloon, followed by the rest of the crowd. Sleepy leaned on the far end of the bar while the rest of them stopped about midway.

"How long have you been away, Hashknife?" asked one of the boys, eying Sleepy, who was watching in the back-bar mirror for the first move.

"Six months," Hashknife removed his sombrero and wiped his face. "We left here early in March."

"I thought yuh did. Old man Sibley has been askin' about yuh every time I seen him and wonderin' if yuh was comin' back."

"What does he want?" asked Hashknife.

"I dunno, unless he's got some mail for yuh. Why don'tcha ask yore friend to have a drink with us, Hashknife?"

"He ain't no friend of mine."

"Am I supposed to cry about it?" asked Sleepy seriously.

"He ain't in love, is he?" asked one of the cowboys.

"Most always," grinned Hashknife. "But this time he ain't. Sleepy thinks it's cute to act thataway. What's new in this country?"

"Nothin'. Thinkin' of stayin' a while, Hashknife?"

"Not under the circumstances, Pep'mint. Well, here's a swift death, gents."

They drank deeply and clattered their glasses back on the bar, while Sleepy grabbed the bar bottle, lowered it an inch and told the bartender to take it out of Hashknife's money.

Then he came up to the bar and shook hands seriously with each of the cowboys, telling each of them that he was glad to make their acquaintance. Amicable relationships being restored, Hashknife decided to visit the postmaster and see if any mail was waiting for him.

Letters seldom reached Hashknife and Sleepy because they were continually on the move. Only in rare cases did they spend more than a month in any one place; usually less. Both of them were top-hand cowboys, capable of taking entire charge of any cattle outfit, their services always in demand. Yet they drifted hither and yon, seeking what they might find on the other side of the hill.

THEY would solemnly swear that they were looking for a peaceful range where they might settle down and live out the rest of their days; a range where all men were living at peace with other men; where honesty prevailed and where a quick draw was unknown.

But fate and itching feet sent them into lands where there was little peace. Perhaps it was only the keen mind of Hashknife Hartley, the fighting ability of them both which brought peace to a troubled range.

They were fatalists, these two. To them all things were written in the Big Book, and they themselves only instruments of the moving finger that wrote their destiny.

"If there's pneumonia written after yore name, it's one cinch yuh won't never get killed with a bullet."

Thus Hashknife, accompanied by a violent nod of agreement from Sleepy. The belief gave them confidence and the feeling that being in the right somehow gave them a decided advantage against a criminal.

Neither of them could split a second on the draw. There was nothing uncanny about their ability to draw a six-gun, nor were they of the dead-shot variety. The West knew many gunmen who were swifter, more accurate than these two. Yet these two lived unscathed. In sporting parlance it might be said that these two men got the "breaks" of the game, but were able to make the breaks for themselves.

They left the Ten Bar saloon and crossed to the little post-office, where they shook hands with the old postmaster.

"I 'lowed yuh'd come back," he told them. "I've got a letter fer you, Hashknife. Darned thing came in April. Didn't know where to catch yuh, so I kept it agin' the day you'd come back t' Calumet."

"Must be pretty stale by this time," smiled Hashknife as the old man handed him the letter.

He squinted at the postmark.

"Arapaho City, eh. Huh! Wonder who I know in Arapaho City?"

"Yuh might find out the answer inside," murmured Sleepy. "It prob'ly wasn't intended as a puzzle."

Hashknife squinted sidewise at Sleepy, who registered innocence of any sarcasm. Hashknife drew out the letter and studied it closely. Several times he read it through before putting it back in the envelope.

"I reckon I better have a package of Durham, Mr. Sibley," he said as he put the letter in his hip pocket and leaned on the counter where the postmaster kept his little stock of candy.

"Yuh better mix me up two-bits' worth of candy, while yo're at it. Them choc'lets look kinda faded, don't they?"

"Don't keep well in this climate, Hashknife. They're jist as good as ever, but they look weak. Eat 'em in the dark and you'd never know they was mulatters."

Hashknife paid for his tobacco and candy, and they wandered outside, where Hashknife reached in the bag, picked out a lopsided chocolate cream and offered it to Sleepy.

"What was in that letter?" demanded Sleepy. "Aw, to —— with that kind of candy!"

"That letter? Oh, yeah. Say, that was kinda queer. Read it."

He handed the letter to Sleepy, sat down on the edge of the sidewalk and began making inroads on his bag of candy.

The letter was written on a piece of cheap tablet paper with a soft lead-pencil, undated, unsigned. It read:

> SIR: We know you are coming to run the HL ranch and you better not because you ain't needed here and your helth will be in dainger if you come here as we have got you spoted. Take warning by this and stay away from around hear.

Sleepy folded up the letter and slid it in the envelope, after which he shoved the letter back in Hashknife's pocket and helped himself from Hashknife's bag of candy.

"Where's Arapaho City?" he asked indifferently.

Hashknife shook his head. His mouth was too full of candy just then. In a little while he wiped the back of his hand across his mouth and got to his feet.

"I was kinda candy hungry," he said slowly. "But it don't take more 'n a ton of that kinda stuff to cure me. What do yuh think of that billy-doo, Sleepy?"

"I dunno. Darned thing was written back in April. Mebby it was somebody's idea of a joke."

"Mm-m-m-m. Let's go down and talk with the sheriff."

"Well, all right. Whatcha goin' to do? Make a complaint?"

"He might know where Arapaho City is, Sleepy."

"Oh, yeah. Well, I sure hope he don't. You ain't takin' that letter serious-like, are yuh, cowboy?"

"Not too serious, pardner. But it don't look like a joke. Who would take the trouble to warn me not to go to the HL ranch when I never even heard of it? I'm just curious."

"They tell about a cat that got curious."

"Askin' won't get anybody killed."

"Not if yuh stop at askin'. But I know you, dang yuh."

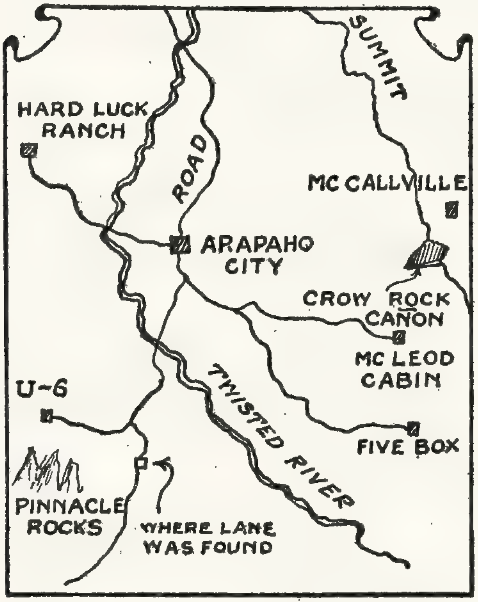
Hashknife grinned thoughtfully as he headed for the sheriff's office. They knew Abe Gleason, the sheriff, and his greeting was not at all assumed.

"Come in, yuh darned pair of tumbleweeds!" he yelled, when the partners squinted in past the open door. "By golly, I'm shore pleased to see yuh both. How are yuh?"

They shook hands joyfully and the big sheriff grinned from ear to ear.

"Long time we no see yuh, Abe," said Hashknife, tilting a chair back against the wall. "How's crime in this country?"

"Not a crime, Hashknife. We ain't had an arrest nor a complaint for six months. Tell me what you've been doin' since last March. By golly, yuh don't look like you'd lost many meals."



"We've been eatin'," grinned Sleepy. "Crime is kinda playin' out everywhere, Abe. Looks as if me and Hashknife will have to settle down at last."

"It won't hurt yuh none. By golly, from what I can hear, you two jiggers has made life easy for a lot of sheriffs in six months. Now, what's on yore mind, Hashknife?"

Hashknife looked up from rolling a cigaret and squinted at the sheriff.

"Where's Arapaho City, Abe?"

"Arapaho City? About ninety miles northwest of here. Up in the Twisted River country. It's plumb away from everybody and everythin', but she's one good cattle country, they tell me. I ain't never been up there, but that's where she is, Hashknife."

"Twisted River country, eh? Have you got a brand register, Abe?"

The sheriff produced the required article, and it did not take Hashknife long to find that the HL outfit was owned by Henry Ludden. It was a combined initial brand, the right side of the H making the main stem of the L.

"Has there been any trouble up in that country?" asked Hashknife, placing the book on the sheriff's desk.

"Not that I know anythin' about, Hashknife. We're a long ways from Arapaho City. I don't even know the sheriff of that county, but I know his name—Pete Darcey. You aimin' to go up thataway?"

"If it's a good cattle country, Abe. Me and Sleepy are on the lookout for a ranch. We're tired of bein' what yuh call tumbleweeds."

"Well, I suppose a feller does kinda want somethin' for himself after he gets old enough to have a little sense. But why dontcha buy somethin' around here? We've got just as good range here as they have in Twisted River."

"I reckon that's all true," nodded Hashknife seriously. "But I got a letter from a feller up in that country today and he kinda intimates that there's somethin' goin' on up in that country, and a feller kinda likes to get in on the ground floor, Abe."

"Oh, sure. Didn't tell yuh what kind of a deal it was, did he?"

"No-o-o-o, he didn't. But he said he'd be expectin' me."

Hashknife got to his feet and yawned widely.

"I reckon we'll stable our broncs, Sleepy, and get us each a good sleep. See yuh later, Abe. We won't leave until tomorrow."

"By golly, you two are just like drops of quicksilver. Yuh won't stay put nowhere."

"I know it, Abe. But we've got to go. This feller is waitin' for us."

As they walked back toward the hitchrack, Sleepy squinted at Hashknife and shook his head wearily.

"Goin' to get in on the ground floor, eh? More likely get six feet under the ground. Feller waitin' for yuh with a proposition. My ——, don'tcha realize that letter was written in April, and this is the latter part of August?"

"That's all true, Sleepy. But some men do have the dangdest amount of patience."

IT WAS four days after Hashknife and Sleepy had entered Calumet that Hank Ludden rode through the Twisted River hills astride a rangy gray horse. He might have posed for a painting of an old Indian scout as he rode along, carrying a Winchester rifle in the crook of his left arm, peering keenly from beneath the brim of his floppy sombrero.

Ludden was a big man, but stooped with age. His long, gray locks straggled from under his hat and mingled with the heavy beard. His nose was slightly hooked and his keen gray eyes were almost hidden beneath jutting eyebrows, which were large enough to make a mustache for an ordinary man.

His arms were long and powerful and his gnarled, heavily veined hands showed great strength. He rode easily in the saddle, guiding his gray horse in and out among the clumps of greasewood and sage without visible effort.

He rode down through a sandy, dry watercourse, disturbing the siesta of several head of cattle, which had been drowsing in the shade of some cottonwoods, and drew up to squint at the brands.

After a few moments of inspection he rode on, heading for a rocky ridge which would give him a view of the surrounding country. The neutral colors of his faded clothes and the gray horse caused them to blend into the general scheme of the landscape, making them almost invisible at a short distance.

Ludden seemed to know where he was going. He rode almost to the top of the ridge, where he drew up and dismounted. The ride had evidently made him a trifle stiff, as he leaned his rifle against a rock and stretched his muscles.

He had dropped his reins, but now he studied the gray inquiringly.

"Goin' to stay there, Ghost? If I had a rope I'd tie yuh. Know danged well you'd bust a rein, if I tied yuh with one. Oh well, I reckon yuh won't go far."

He picked up his rifle and went on up the slope, glancing back at the gray which was standing still, its ears forward, watching its master. Ludden had never been quite successful in teaching Ghost to stand still with only the dropped reins.

Ludden angled along the ridge, being quite careful not to expose himself on the skyline, and came in behind a granite outcropping. He did not know that the gray horse was picking its way along behind him, stepping occasionally on the reins, but wise enough to lift its foot from the rein before going ahead.

The old man crawled slowly to the top of the granite pile where he peered over the edge. Below him the hill sloped sharply, heavily covered with brush, down to an open swale or clearing which had once been the site of a ranch-house. One of the old buildings, or rather a part of it, was still standing at the far side of the clearing.

Almost in the center of the clearing was a tumble-down pole corral, and it was on this corral that Ludden fixed his eyes. Inside the enclosure were several head of young stock milling around, looking for an exit, while just outside the corral gate were two men bending over a red yearling while the third man stood a little apart, holding a tight rope on the animal. A few feet away a tiny fire blazed, almost smokeless in the thin air.

Ludden's brows drew down over his eyes, and his gnarled fingers gripped the rifle tightly.

"—— yuh, I knowed I'd find yuh if I kept at it!" he gritted to himself. "It took me a long time and a lot of trips. I wish I could git down there among yuh."

He scanned the hillside, looking for a possible chance to sneak up on them. They were at least two hundred yards away, and it was impossible for Ludden to identify them. Their horses were in the brush to the left of the corral, too well hidden for Ludden to distinguish their colors.

He began to realize that the odds were in favor of the rustlers. Even if he did sneak in on them, three men are hard to handle. He knew they would kill him with no more compunction than they would show a rattlesnake.

He studied them closely, trying to note some action, some mannerism which might enable him to identify them. But he was looking down at them, almost a bird's-eye view, which made it more difficult for him.

One of the men walked over, placed some more wood on the fire and appeared to be examining the branding-iron. Ludden scanned the surrounding country, looking for more stock.

"They're just startin'," he told himself. "Iron ain't quite ready yet for the first one, and there's a dozen more in the corral. I'll take it easy, and mebby I can drop down close enough to identify some of 'em."

He eased back slightly and reached toward his hip pocket for his tobacco. Came the shrill nicker of a horse, and he whirled around to see Ghost standing full at the top of the ridge fifty feet away, reins dragging, as he bugled his call to the rustler's horses.

"You —— fool!" Ludden's angry snort was almost loud enough for the rustlers to hear.

They had heard the gray horse and could see against the skyline that the horse was carrying a saddle. Ludden turned and lifted his rifle. Two of the men had crawled swiftly through the corral fence, darted among the frightened cattle and were going out the other side before Ludden could see just what had become of them.

The third one was running past the left side of the corral, going toward the horses when Ludden fired.

The bullet struck just beyond the running man, and he jumped like a frightened rabbit.

As Ludden levered in another cartridge the two men sprang across the open space between corral and the brush, leaving the old man swearing bitterly and searching the brush with eager eyes, his finger caressing the trigger of his 30-30.

He knew that they could not mount their horses without exposing themselves above the brushtop. So he crouched in the rocks, waiting for their next move. He felt sure that the three men were down there in the brush, waiting for him to expose his hiding place.

He cursed the gray horse which still posed on the ridge and waited patiently. Ten minutes passed without any sign of the rustlers.

Ludden squinted back at the gray and noticed that it was watching far to the left of where the horses had been. Suddenly the old man realized what had been done. Instead of mounting their horses, the rustlers had led them away, keeping to an old trail where the brush grew high enough to mask their passing.

HE SPRANG to his feet and ran up the ridge, passing the gray, which snorted and moved aside. On up the rocky ridge ran the old man, almost out of breath, swearing at himself for letting them outwit him. About a hundred and fifty yards up the ridge beyond the horse he stopped and dropped to one knee.

Three riders were traveling away from him, going out of another swale. It was evident that these men had led their horses over into this swale, knowing that the point of the hill had cut off the view of the man who had shot at them, and were mounted and making their getaway complete.

It was a long shot. Carefully the old man twisted up the peep-sight, estimating rapidly.

"Five hundred yards," he muttered. "Rather be over than under. Movin' target at five hundred."

He cuddled the butt of the rifle against his cheek, took a quick aim and squeezed the trigger. The hills flung back the clattering echoes of the rifle shot, and the three riders flared out fan-wise. It was evident that the bullet struck close to them.

The rifle spoke again, and the left-hand rider was almost unseated when the bullet hummed off the ground under his horse's nose.

"Shootin' low," muttered Ludden, adjusting his sight. "Make it six hundred."

The riders were spreading farther apart now, and almost to the skyline of the low saddle in the hills. Ludden sprawled on the ground, resting the rifle across a stunted greasewood. This time he was more careful. The rider was bearing to the left. The ivory bead completely covered horse and rider at that distance.

Then he swung the bead slightly to the left, squeezing the trigger as he swung the sight. Quickly he lifted his head and peered across the wide swale.

For a moment he thought he had knocked the man out of his saddle. The horse whirled and stopped, while the man recovered, straightened up in his saddle and went on over the ridge. But he swayed in his saddle, humped over, until at that distance he looked like a pack on the horse instead of a human being.

"By ——, I got one of 'em!" exclaimed Ludden. He got to his feet and ran back to the gray horse which snorted wildly, but allowed the old man to catch him easily.

He mounted and sent the gray down the hill on a stiff gallop. It was dangerously steep and brushy, but Hank Ludden cared nothing for this. He fixed his eyes on the low saddle in the hills where that hump-backed rider had disappeared and let Ghost worry about the footing.

They crashed down through the heavy brush at the bottom, lurched over the bank of a washout and headed for the top of the swale. Ghost was a willing runner in spite of the fact that his rider was a heavy man.

Ludden kept a close watch on the skyline, thinking that the other two riders might ambush him at the crest of the hill, but there was no sign of them. He gained the top and drew rein, his eyes sweeping the hills ahead.

To the left and below him he could see part of the road which led toward Arapaho City. The gray was blowing heavily from the uphill run, and the old man eased himself in his saddle, wiping some blood off his face from the scratch of a greasewood limb.

Then he caught a glimpse of a rider, going slowly toward the road. Ludden lifted his rifle, but lowered it again. He had no way of being sure that this was one of the rustlers, as the brush obstructed his view.

"I can see him plain when he reaches the road," he told himself. "Mebbe I better swing farther to the left."

He turned his horse around, dropped below the skyline and galloped to the left, intending to come back to the crest about two hundred yards farther along the hill.

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy had made no record time in covering the distance between Calumet and Arapaho City. It was a sparsely settled region they had traversed and the ranches were few and far between, but they carried enough food for their meager wants.

"That feller has been waitin' since April," said Hashknife, "so a few extra days won't worry him none."

And so they had dawdled through the hills, enjoying the sun, admiring the stars until they struck a dusty road, winding in and out of the hills. And near where they struck the road they also found a weather-beaten sign, pointing north—

Arapaho City

And beneath the lettering some wag had written—

This is a quit-claim deed for my share of the darned thing.

Hashknife laughed softly as they rode on.

"Sounds interestin', Sleepy. That feller had a sense of humor and it was too much for him. Mebbe we'll ride past here, headed the other way and leave two more quit-claim deeds for the next lucky men."

"Be —— lucky to ride past," said Sleepy. "I have a feelin' that Arapaho City is a buzz-saw village."

"Yore liver's bad, Sleepy. This is a beautiful country. It ain't reasonable to suppose that a man could live amid such beauty and harbor mean thoughts. Chirk up, cowboy. Who knows what is ahead of us? Mebby they'll send us to the Legislature. Mebby they'll—"

Hashknife drew up his horse, lifted himself in his stirrups and scanned the hills. Sleepy drew rein and squinted at Hashknife.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

It came again—the far-away echo of a rifle shot.

"Nothin' but a rifle shot," observed Sleepy. "If they're shootin' at us, they're sure doin' it at long range. Probably somebody fussin' with a coyote."

As they moved forward again they heard the echo of another shot.

"Three times and out," laughed Hashknife, scanning the hills. "Anyway, it sounds like we were entering civilization."

They rode along the crooked, dusty highway where the brush grew close to the wagon ruts, down through a wide swale and into a straight stretch of road. About two hundred yards ahead they could see where the road turned abruptly to the right at the point of a hill.

To the left and ahead was the broken ridge with a low saddle and farther to the left were high pinnacles like spires of a great cathedral.

Suddenly a rider broke through the brush about a hundred yards ahead. The road was not over twelve feet wide from brush to brush and the sun was almost directly in the eyes of the two cowboys.

It was like a short flash of a motion picture. The horse lurched across the road, the rider falling flat in the dust; nothing left except a little dust cloud, plumped up from the sprawling figure of the man, and the man himself, whose raiment blended well with the yellowish-gray dust. The dust cloud disappeared and there was nothing except the man, a hardly visible something, lying across the road. The horse had disappeared so quickly that neither of the cowboys could have sworn to its color or size.

"Don't that beat ——?" queried Hashknife vacantly.

"Anyway," said Sleepy dryly, "it at least runs a dead-heat. Jist about what did happen, Hashknife?"

"I dunno. That danged sun was square in my eyes, but I think I seen a horse cross the road, drop its rider and keep on goin'."

"I'm glad that's what you seen, Hashknife, 'cause that was my impression. Mebby we better look a little closer, eh?"

They spurred their horses forward and were halfway to the prone figure when Hashknife's sombrero was almost jerked from his head. Came the sharp crack of smokeless powder from the crest of the ridge and the two cowpunchers instinctively whirled their horses to the right, crashing them straight through the brush.

Nor did they pause to investigate. Sprawling low in their saddles, protecting their faces as best they might from the whipping branches, they rode at a headlong gallop, while bullets whispered around them as Hank Ludden frantically worked the lever of his rifle at the top of the ridge.

Luckily they struck down through a ravine before the old man could reload his rifle, and in a few minutes they were again on the road, but too far away for Ludden to see them.

"THAT'S what I'd call a —— of a reception," panted Sleepy as they drew rein and looked back, picking the pieces of broken limbs from their torn shirts. Sleepy had a long streamer of clematis vine around his neck, which made him look as if he had been roped. He threw it aside and squinted at Hashknife who was examining the floppy brim of his sombrero which had been torn by the bullet.

From off to their right came the *whang* of another shot, and they instinctively dodged.

"Aw, —— such a business!" snorted Sleepy disgustedly. "Let's pull out, cowboy. C'mon."

"Yuh don't have to coax me." Hashknife rowled his horse and they headed down the road at a stiff gallop.

They did not know that Hank Ludden was hot on their trail. He had shot at Hashknife from the back of the gray horse, which shifted slightly as he pulled the trigger, thereby causing Hank to miss by scant inches.

Hank had seen the rider fall from the horse and had decided that at least one of the rustlers was down and out. But he was not satisfied with one; so he swung his horse down the hill, angling over to the road, trying to get another shot at the two who had escaped him again.

The road entered Arapaho City from the south, but Hashknife and Sleepy did not enter boldly. An old road which led past some old ranch buildings caught their fancy, and they circled the west side of the town, coming in at the north end where they dismounted at a little-used hitch-rack.

Casually they walked to the corner and surveyed the main street of Arapaho City. Beside them was the Pekin Café from which savory odors assailed their nostrils. On the opposite side of the street was the Arapaho Livery and Feed Stable in front of which was a huge water-trough, leaking badly and making a mud hole in the street.

Farther up the street, on the same side, was the blacksmith shop, postoffice and a number of saloons. On the opposite side were signs which proclaimed the Arapaho Hotel, Steve's Chop House, Arapaho Stage Office, Twisted River Mercantile Co., Deschamps Drug Co., Sheriff's Office.

The buildings and signs were weatherbeaten, gray with dust from the street which billowed from the passing teams or riding horses. At the south end of the town was a blasted old cottonwood, like a great, gnarled hand, the forefinger pointing skyward.

A few wagon teams were tied at the hitchracks, and a scattering of saddle-horses nodded in the sun. A couple of mongrel dogs, as if by mutual consent, met in the middle of the street, circled each other, growling deeply, turned and went back to their respective shades as if the fighting game was hardly worth while under the circumstances.

Near the front of the Twisted River Mercantile Store a small boy labored at the handle of a creaking old pump to which was attached a hose. The nozzle of the hose was held by a big man who industriously sprinkled the street adjacent to the front of the store, doing a thorough job in spite of the fact that the motive power's shirt had parted company with its pants and was in a fair way to complete exhaustion.

Hashknife and Sleepy grinned at each other and went into the Pekin Café where a little old Chinaman grinned at them from the kitchen door, bobbing his head violently.

He came up and motioned them to a table, after which he began in a sing-song voice:

"Losa beef, losa po'k, veala stew, libba-bacon, ham a' egg—w'at yo' like, eh? Yo' like soup? Soup velly good t'day."

"Ham and eggs," said Hashknife, and Sleepy nodded to the Chinaman to bring him the same.

"Two ham a' egg, eh? Yo' want soup?"

"Is it compulsory?" asked Sleepy curiously.

"This time noodle."

"No soup, Charley," Sleepy grinned widely. "Too hot."

"Velly good."

As the Chinaman bustled away a man came in, glanced sharply at Hashknife and Sleepy and sat down near the door. He was a big man, slightly gray, with a heavily-lined face and sad-looking eyes. He wore a faded blue shirt, overalls and high-heeled boots. His belt sagged from the weight of his holstered gun, and the bottom of the holster was held down by a whang-leather string which circled the man's leg.

The Chinaman came bustling in, deposited knives and forks on the table, and hurried over to the newcomer, who lifted his head and smiled slowly.

"Hello, She'iff," said the Chinaman. "What yo' like, eh? Got plenty good soup."

"Ham and eggs, I reckon."

"Yessah. Egg ve'y good today."

He bustled away and Hashknife studied the profile of the big man—Pete Darcey, sheriff of Arapaho. As Hashknife studied the sheriff, he thought of the quit-claim notice on the old sign board—

"This is a quit-claim deed for my share of the darned thing."

Perhaps the job of being sheriff of Arapaho had drawn the lines of sadness in this big man's face, thought Hashknife. The sheriff's hands were on the table—big, powerful hands, fit to grip the big gun which sagged at his hip.

The sheriff, after his first keen glance, had paid no attention to Hashknife and Sleepy, but seemed to stare gloomily toward the sun-baked street.

Some one was coming down the board sidewalk, his boots rattling heavily on the loose boards. The sheriff shifted his gaze to Hank Ludden, who flung the door open and stepped inside the place. He was breathing heavily, carrying his hat in his hand.

"A kid at the pump told me you was here, Sheriff," he said, leaning his hands on the sheriff's table as he recovered his breath. "I was at yore office." He looked back at the open door, took a deep breath and turned to the sheriff.

"I connected with three rustlers at the old U6 ranch. They had a dozen yearlin's in the corral and was warmin' their first iron. My horse nickered and ruined things for me. They fogged out but—" Ludden paused for another deep breath—"I nailed one of 'em out in that low saddle east of the Pinnacle Rocks. He stuck to the saddle until he hit the road, and then dropped.

"The other two tried to pick him up, but I drove 'em away, and I think they headed for town. I had a dead bead on one of 'em, but my horse moved and ruined it for me."

The sheriff got to his feet and headed for the door, followed by Hank Ludden, while Hashknife and Sleepy confined their attention to the Chinaman who was bringing in their order.

The Chinaman glanced quickly at the backs of the two men who were going out.

"Bring us each half of the sheriff's order, Charley," said Hashknife. "He ain't got time to eat now, and we can sure eat an extra egg apiece."

"Yessah, velly good. She'iff go way quick, eh?"

"Somethin' about cattle rustlers, Charley."

"O-o-oh. Lustle cows, eh? Other man Hank Ludden, yo' *sabe?* Velly good man. I *sabe* him long time."

"Cattleman?" asked Hashknife.

"Yessah. Plenty cow one time. Mebbe not so much now."

"Uh-huh. Sell all his cows, eh?"

"No sell much. Plenty cow get lost, yo' *sabe.* Long time cow get lost. No catchum lustler. Somebody name Hard Luck lanch. HL all same Hard Luck, yo' *sabe?* Hoo-o-o! Egg fry too —— much!"

The Chinaman turned and galloped toward the kitchen while Hashknife and

Sleepy squinted knowingly at each other and attacked their food.

"Had a dead bead on one of 'em, but the horse moved and spoiled it," muttered Hashknife, quoting Hank Ludden's statement softly. "I'll have to buy that horse a bale of hay as a reward. So that's the which of it, eh? By golly, we sure were lucky to save our scalps today, pardner."

"And tomorrow is another day," said Sleepy meaningly, as he tried to slide half an egg on the blade of his knife.

"That sheriff looks sad enough to do anythin', and I don't want to run up against Hank Ludden, movin' horse or no movin' horse. This country sure looks salty to me."

The Chinaman came shuffling back, bearing the sheriff's order which he placed on their table.

"Is the sheriff a pretty good man, Charley?" asked Hashknife. He thought there might be a chance to get some information from the Chinaman who seemed inclined to gossip.

"Yessah, velly good man. Be she'iff long time."

"Uh-huh. Hank Ludden good man, too, eh?"

"Yessah."

"Good friend to sheriff?"

"Mebbe. I do' know. 'Lucky' Joe marry Ludden daughter."

"Thasso? Who is Lucky Joe?"

"Dep'ty she'iff."

"Been married long time, Charley?"

"Fo' five month. Ludden not like, I guess. Yo' want mo' coffee?"

"Yeah, I'll have some more," said Sleepy. "You make good coffee, Charley."

"Yessah. My name Pat Lee."

"Irish?" queried Hashknife seriously.

"Yessah, all same Irish."

He smiled blandly and headed for the kitchen.

"It's a great country," declared Hashknife. "They write a letter darin' yuh to come, shoot at yuh when yuh arrive and name their Chinaman after an Irish saint."

"If we had any sense, we'd pull out right away," said Sleepy. "The only thing we can gain here is a tombstone."

Hashknife grinned softly and shook his head.

"That's for the Big Book to say, Sleepy. We don't keep our own books, so we don't know what our balance is. We've started in by eatin' the sheriff's meal. Who can say what will come next?"

WHEN Hank Ludden and the sheriff left the restaurant they went straight to the sheriff's office. The sheriff took a rifle from his gun rack and led the way to the livery stable where he kept his horses.

"No use takin' anybody else, I reckon," said the sheriff.

"Not much," agreed Ludden. "Who were the two strangers in Pat's place, Pete?"

"Never seen 'em before in my life," replied the sheriff, lifting his saddle off a peg and throwing it on a roan horse which the stableman had led out to him. "They were eatin' in there when I came in."

He cinched his saddle and called to the stableman—

"Seen anythin' of Joe this mornin', Al?"

"Yeah. He said he was goin' out to the Five Box."

"Thanks."

Hank Ludden scowled at the mention of Joe Lane's name. He did not like Joe Lane, known as Lucky Joe, a rather handsome, devil-may-care sort of person, deputy to Pete Darcey.

Hank Ludden's whole life had centered around his daughter Mary, and when Joe Lane came courting her, Hank lost no time in telling Joe that he was not eligible. Joe quietly informed Hank that he was not intending to marry him, and that his private opinions of his, Joe's, worth were merely one-man ideas.

Mary Ludden was a tall, slender, wistful-eyed girl with a wealth of chestnut hair, a pleasing personality and a mind of her own. It is not at all unlikely that she could have had her pick of the young men of the Arapaho country, but she eloped with Lucky Joe Lane, and the world soured for Hank Ludden and "Armadillo" Jones, his partner.

Mary and Joe took up their residence in Arapaho City, and Hank Ludden ignored their existence.

Every one in the country knew about it. Many of the old-timers shook their heads and said it was only another mark against the Hard Luck ranch.

The first owner had been Jim Shafer who registered the Circle S brand. He was an experienced cattleman from Texas. Within a year he was thrown from a horse and instantly killed. His son, a wild-riding young man of twenty-five, took charge of the Circle S, carried on the business for a year, when he accidentally killed himself with a revolver.

Jim Shafer's widow sold the ranch to a Robert Morgan, who changed the brand to the Bar M and proceeded to get himself killed in a runaway in the yard of the ranch-house. Title descended to his brother, who operated the ranch successfully for over a year, only to be killed by a bolt of lightning on the ranch-house porch.

It was then that Hank Ludden and Armadillo Jones bought out the place, putting in every cent they had, changing the brand to the HL. But the proverbial hard luck of the ranch still remained. Try as they might they could not make it pay.

Instead of an increase there was a decrease. Each roundup showed them a loss of many head of stock, and in spite of continual vigilance, their cattle vanished. The law had little appeal to either Hank or Armadillo. They had been partners for years—prospecting, mining, working with cattle.

The marriage of Hank Ludden had broken their partnership, but the death of Mrs. Ludden, shortly after Mary was born, brought them together again stronger than ever. Armadillo even claimed a fifty-fifty interest in Mary, and he disliked Joe Lane as much as Hank Ludden did.

The sheriff and Hank Ludden rode out of Arapaho City together. There were many curious people who had seen Hank Ludden gallop into town, and they wonderd what had happened to cause him to come for the sheriff, knowing that Hank had little use for any one connected with the office.

"You didn't look at this man, didja?" asked the sheriff as they galloped along the dusty road.

"Didn't take time. I seen him fall and he's there yet."

The sheriff nodded grimly. The identity of this rustler might help to implicate the other two men. They swung around the right-hand turn at the point of the hill and came out on the straight piece of road. Hank Ludden raised in his stirrups and pointed up the road.

"There he is, Pete. Right where he fell."

The dust-covered body was lying sprawled across the road just as it had fallen from the horse.

They reined their horses and dismounted. A soaring buzzard's shadow crossed the yellow dust between them and the body, and the sheriff glanced upward, a scowl on his face. Then he strode forward, knelt in the dust and turned the man over.

Hank Ludden cried out sharply and stepped back, while the sheriff looked up at him wonderingly.

It was Lucky Joe Lane, Ludden's son-in-law.

"Pete, it—it—," Ludden's hand shook as he removed his sombrero and wiped the cold perspiration from his brow.

"It can't be," he whispered. "Why, Joe Lane—"

"It's Joe Lane," said the sheriff softly. "My deputy, Hank."

"Yeah, it's Joe Lane," huskily. "I—I don't quite *sabe* it, Pete."

The sheriff squinted down at the dusty face of the dead man for a long time, while Hank Ludden gripped his cartridge belt and stared into space. He had killed the husband of Mary. For the first time in his life he realized that she loved this man—this dust-covered person who sprawled in the dust, his sightless eyes half-closed, staring up at the blue sky. Hank remembered that Joe was so particular about his personal appearance, and it did not seem right for him to be sprawling in the dust.

The sheriff looked up and there was a suspicion of moisture about his eyes as he squinted at Hank Ludden and said—

"Hank, you ain't lyin' about this, are yuh?"

"Lyin' about what, Pete?"

"About findin' Joe with the rustlers. You ain't—"

The old man shook his head slowly.

"He was one of 'em, Pete. Good ——, do yuh think, Pete, I didn't like Joe. Mebbe I was just selfish, I dunno. But you know I wouldn't murder a man. I—I didn't recognize him."

The sheriff nodded slowly.

"I know how yuh feel, Hank. It hurts me a lot, I'll tell yuh. I liked Joe. Oh, why in —— do men do things like this, Hank? Joe didn't have to steal cattle. He could live on his salary. He could have every cent I own if he wanted it."

"Mebbe I didn't treat him square," whispered Hank. "Mebbe he wanted to git even with me, Pete."

The sheriff shook his head.

"No, Joe wasn't that kind of a person, Hank. He's never said a word against yuh—not to me. Are yuh sure they was stealin' your cattle?"

"No. But they were stealin', Pete. Honest men don't corral yearlin' stock, build a brandin' fire, and high-tail it out of the country when a horse nickers."

"No, they don't, Hank." The sheriff grew thoughtful. "Shall I tell Mary about it? She'll have to know about it, and you—"

"Go ahead and say it, Pete. I killed her husband."

"I ain't blamin' yuh, Hank. It's ——, but directions says take it. I thought as much of Joe as I would of my own boy, but I'm not blamin' you. Things just worked out this way."

"Others will blame me," said Hank hoarsely. "They know I didn't like Joe, and they'll say things."

"Bein' human, they will," nodded the sheriff. "I wish we'd brought a wagon. Mebbe we can kinda drape him across my saddle, and I'll ride behind. I reckon that's the best thing to do, Hank."

Together they placed the body, face down across the saddle, and the sheriff mounted behind the saddle.

"Do yuh want me to go back with yuh, Pete?"

"Mebbe yuh better not, Hank. I'll fix things up as well as I can."

"Thank yuh, Pete," Hank Ludden held out his hand. "So-long."

Their hands met, gripped tightly, and the sheriff rode away, leaving Hank standing in the middle of the road, looking after him.

THE sheriff jogged around the curve and Hank went to his horse which he mounted and rode off the road to the left, heading toward the low saddle in the hills. The shock of finding he had killed Joe Lane took all the fight out of the old man, and all he could think of was how would Mary take the news.

He could mentally picture Pete Darcey telling her that Joe was dead and that her father had killed him. He wondered if there wasn't some way of telling her; some way of taking away the sting.

Could it have been an accident, he wondered. But he knew it was not. The three men were together, and it was merely a twist of fate which made Joe Lane the target instead of one of the others.

Ludden struck the trail where the rustlers had led their horses from near the corral, and came out into the clearing. The little branding fire had long since burned itself out, and the corral was empty. Not a yearling remained within the enclosure.

"Came back and turned 'em all loose," muttered Ludden. "Not even ashes left of the brandin' fire and no brandin' iron."

He searched all around the place, but was unable to find any evidence that any misbranding had been attempted. Down in his heart he was glad that the sheriff had not come to the corral with him. It would have looked bad for him. Even the spot in the dust where the one animal had been thrown had been trampled by the feet of the escaping yearlings.

Ludden mounted his horse, climbed the ridge from which he had first seen the rustlers and rode down across the hills toward the Hard Luck ranch, northwest of Arapaho City.

It was not a pretentious place, this Hard Luck ranch. The buildings had been placed on sort of a low mesa which jutted out into the wide mouth of a little valley like the prow of a battleship. A small, brush-lined stream wended its way around it.

Behind the small ranch-house the ground sloped sharply to the brush-covered hills. The ranch-house itself was originally a log building, but it had been added to until little of the original was left. The bunkhouse was of logs, but the stables and sheds were of rough lumber, unpainted, scoured by age, the corrals of pole and lumber.

A huge live-oak tree shaded the front of the ranch-house and at the rear grew a clump of big sycamores.

Roses climbed over the old porch, uncared for since Mary had left the ranch, and on the window ledges were flower-pots, containing what had once been geraniums, but now merely wisps of dried substance, perished for want of moisture.

Armadillo Jones was sitting on his heels in the shade of the stable repairing a harness as Hank Ludden rode in past the corral and approached the stable.

Armadillo was a little man—thin, wiry, with a wrinkled, parchment-like face and a bristling, gray mustache. He was nearly bald, and when he lifted his eyebrows the wrinkles extended far above his original hair line.

Armadillo's nose was large, almost too large for his face, and his keen, gray eyes were deeply set in a nest of hair-like wrinkles. His hands were long, bony, mahogany-tinted, and his legs, even in his squatting position, showed a decided tendency to bow.

One side of his face bulged from an enormous chew of tobacco which he shifted slowly, spat deliberately and nodded to Hank Ludden, while his eyes squinted keenly at his partner.

Ludden dropped his reins and squatted beside Armadillo. It seemed the natural thing for him to do. Armadillo examined the mended strap, tested it by hooking one foot in a loop and pulling heavily. Then he tossed it aside, spat wearily and leaned back against the stable wall.

"I found three rustlers at the old U6," stated Ludden thickly. "I dropped one of 'em in the road on the other side of Pinnacle Rocks."

"Didja?" Armadillo spat viciously. "Good! Who was he?"

"Joe Lane."

"Oh, m' ——! No!"

"Yeah."

They didn't look at each other. Armadillo's jaws worked industriously and the long, lean fingers picked at the knees of his overalls, his eyes squinting painfully.

"Well," he said slowly, "I ain't a —— of a lot surprized. It'll be tough on Mary."

"Yeah, it'll be tough on her, Armadillo."

"—— tough!"

For several minutes neither of them spoke. Then Armadillo broke the silence.

"Speakin' of things bein' tough, Hank, I killed that old white leg'rn rooster for supper, but I'll be danged if I think we can eat him. I've had him on to b'ile for five whole hours now and about all he's done is to e-vaporate the water."

"That's all right, Armadillo. I ain't got no appetite."

"Appetite won't make no difference to that bird. The man that eats him has got to be plumb vicious."

"I reckon we better go to town," said Ludden wearily. "Might as well face the music."

"Yeah, we might as well," Armadillo spat thoughtfully and got to his feet. "I dunno what the music will be though. It's gettin' to be a —— of a country, when a feller has to get a rustler's name and a-dress before shootin' him, for fear he might belong to a prominent fambly."

"He was Mary's husband," said Ludden softly.

"Good ——, don't set there and tell me about it! Ain't I been thinkin' about it until m' ears ring? Do yuh think I'm so —— ignorant that I don't realize things like that? Hank, I dunno—" Armadillo's voice softened. "It's terrible. I s'pose the best thing to do is to throw that —— rooster away and eat supper in Arapaho City."

WHILE the sheriff rode back to Arapaho City with the body of his deputy sheriff and Hank Ludden went back to the Hard Luck ranch, trouble was brewing in another part of the Twisted River range, Scotty McLeod's ranch.

It was a little ranch—just a two-room shack and a tumble-down stable, but within the fenced enclosure, bubbling from under a spreading sycamore was a big spring which flowed water which did not freeze, even in the coldest weather.

It was not hot water, but cool enough to drink at any time, yet it was practically the same temperature all the year around. And it was located on what the Five Box outfit claimed as their range.

In other words, Scotty McLeod was a nester, a fighting Scot who defied the Five Box to put him off his little ranch. "Dutch" O'Day, owner of the Five Box, had tried in many ways to oust Scotty, but all his efforts had failed.

Not satisfied to hold the ranch and run his few head of stock, Scotty, angry at the Five Box, had secretly brought in a dozen sheep which he close-herded. To flaunt a dozen sheep in the face of the Five Box was like dangling a red rag in front of an angry bull.

Cowboys had taken long shots at the sheep in Scotty's front yard, but without any casualties. Perhaps it was because they feared Scotty's skill with a rifle that they did not come close enough for a good shot at the sheep.

But on this day Scotty had been to town, and in the meantime his sheep had managed to get out of the yard. Scotty noticed that about half of them had vanished when he returned; so he intended to fix the fence before cooking himself a meal, resolving to round up the lost sheep right away.

He was absorbed in the latest newspaper while his coffee-pot boiled over when he heard a noise at the door. Looking up, he beheld the face of Ben Corliss, foreman of the Five Box, a big, lean-faced man with a broken nose. Corliss carried a six-shooter in his right hand, with which he motioned to Scotty.

Corliss was a much bigger man than Scotty who was what might be termed undersized. Scotty's hair was a flaming red and the color of his chin was almost the same tint, which exaggerated the blue of his eyes.

"What do ye want?" asked Scotty coldly.

"C'mere, nester," Corliss motioned him outside. "Don't make no fool break for a gun, McLeod."

"I'm no fool!" snapped Scotty.

He followed Corliss out in the yard where he beheld his best sheep, now nothing more than an inanimate drag on the end of Corliss' lariat rope.

"There's four more back in the hills—dead," said Corliss. "If you think you can turn sheep loose in these hills, you've got another think comin'."

"They got away," said Scotty simply. "I was in town."

"Got away, eh?" Corliss backed to the carcass of the sheep and removed his rope which he coiled and threw over the horn of his saddle.

"You better imitate the sheep, McLeod. We've tolerated you about as long as we care to. *Sabe?* We need a reason to wipe you out, and yore sheep furnished it. Now, you high-tail it out of here before we come back."

"Ye mean to come back, do ye?" Scotty smiled softly. "Well, I'll try to meet ye with a gr-r-rin, Cor-r-r-lis."

Scotty began burring his r's, which indicated that he was getting angry.

"Yeah, we'll be back," snarled Corliss.

"I'll tr-ry to be here."

"Yuh will, eh? Fine. Walk down to the gate with me, McLeod. I'm not goin' to take any chances on you pottin' me with yore rifle from the house."

He forced Scotty to go with him to the gate and stand there while he mounted his horse.

"Now you just try runnin' back to the house," laughed Corliss. "The rest of my outfit are settin' out there in range of here, and they'll make a sieve of yore shack in about a minute. So go slow, you sheep-lovin' pup."

Corliss touched the spurs to his horse and galloped away, while the little Scot ducked low and ran swiftly toward his doorway, zig-zagging his course. A moment later he knew that Corliss had not lied.

A bullet struck in the gravel just beyond him, throwing up a little spurt of dust and hitting the house a resounding thwack! Another struck near his feet, ricocheted and broke one of the shack windows.

But before another one could throw gravel in his face, he dived through the doorway, rolled across the floor and lifted his rifle from where it stood in a corner of the room.

Then he ran back, wriggled out through an open window and ran to the corner where a scraggly bush gave him a little cover. He could see Corliss riding along through some heavy cover, and just beyond him he could see two horses. A man got into a saddle and seemed to be waving an arm at Corliss.

But Corliss was riding into heavier brush now, and Scotty could not see him plainly. The other man had shifted his position, which rather confused Scotty, but as he squinted at the brushy hillside he could see a moving horse. He was not exactly sure as to the identity of the rider, nor whether there was a rider, but decided that at least he would make somebody move quickly.

Scotty did not look any farther. He lifted his 45-70 rifle, swung the muzzle against the corner of the house, caught a quick sight and squeezed the trigger.

The big rifle jerked violently and its crashing report was flung back by the hills, while a cloud of smoke drifted back into Scotty's face.

He lowered the muzzle quickly. He could see a saddle horse, but there was no sign of the rider. The horse turned and ran over the brow of the hill. Farther to the left some one was shooting at the house, and Scotty could hear the bullets hitting the walls. He levered in another cartridge and waited for some one to expose himself.

THE entrance of the sheriff with his dead deputy caused Arapaho City to wake up. Joe Lane had been a favorite in the town, and his demise was more or less of a shock to every one. The sheriff went straight to his office, where several men helped him place the body on a cot.

To all their questioning the sheriff turned a deaf ear until the coroner had been notified. Then he gave them this short statement:

"Hank Ludden caught him rustlin' cattle and shot him. Hank didn't know who he was. There was two other men with him, and they were operatin' at the old U6 corral."

Hashknife and Sleepy were in the crowd which grouped around the doorway of the sheriff's office, and it seemed to Hashknife that no one believed the sheriff.

"Rustlin' ——!" snorted a cattleman. "Good excuse."

The sheriff looked sharply at the speaker, but did not reply. He had expected just such sentiment.

"Speakin' of shootin'," remarked a fat-faced cowboy, whose legs were too short for his barrel-like body. "I jist rode in from the Five Box, and I shore hears a —— of a lot of shootin' goin' on over toward that nester's place. Sounded like Fo'th of July."

"Prob'ly somebody takin' pot-shots at the —— shepherd," laughed another. "I hear he's got twelve sheep. He's sure due to grab a harp pretty soon."

The coroner arrived, and the sheriff ushered him in, shutting the door against the rest of the crowd, which resented such practise and repaired to the nearest saloon to talk things over.

Hashknife and Sleepy lingered until the sheriff came out, which was about a minute after the rest of the crowd had vanished. He squinted at Hashknife and Sleepy, stopped as if waiting for them to ask a question, and then walked to his horse.

"You goin' over to the nester's place?" asked Hashknife.

The sheriff paused and looked at them. It was rather unusual for a stranger to interest himself in this way.

"Why?" he asked shortly.

"Thought we might ride along and talk with yuh."

"Well—" The sheriff paused. "Talk about what?"

"Oh, cabbages and kings, mebbe."

"Cabbages? What's the joke, stranger?"

"No joke. Wait until we get our horses and we'll ride out there with yuh. It might interest yuh to know that we was the two men that Hank Ludden missed, when his horse moved."

"Ye-e-eah?" The sheriff's mouth opened widely, and his right hand slipped from his hip, where it had been resting.

"He mistook us for the two rustlers," explained Hashknife quickly.

The sheriff's mouth resumed its normal expression and he nodded slowly.

"Go get yore horses," he said.

And then he added as an afterthought when he realized where their horses were tied—

"Swing around the town and meet me outside, will yuh?"

They mounted and left Arapaho over the same route they had used in entering. A quarter of a mile from town they overtook the sheriff who spurred his horse to a gallop.

"We'll talk later," he yelled at them. "Prob'ly have more time later on."

That arrangement was all right with Hashknife and Sleepy. They realized that here was a sheriff who knew the value of swift action, and they appreciated the fact that he could wait to hear what they had to say.

About a mile from town the road to the nester's ranch turned sharply to the left, while the main road continued to the Five Box. There was no let-up in speed. The sheriff sat his horse well, scanning the country as he rode.

Suddenly he jerked his horse sharply, almost blocking the two men behind him.

"Didja hear that shot?" he asked.

It came again, the echoing bang of a rifle, and not so far away.

"C'mon!" The sheriff roweled his horse and they went pounding up the old road, heading for the sound of the guns.

"Mebbe some —— fool is target shootin'," yelled the sheriff, "but we've got to find out."

The road led down through a ravine, twisting in and out of the brush, came out into a little valley, studded here and there with oak clumps, sloping gently upward toward where the nester's cabin was located.

The three riders drew rein and scanned the surrounding hills. To the right of them and up on the side of the steep hill a huge outcropping of granite jutted out. And, as they scanned the hills, from behind this granite dike came the *whang* of a high-power rifle.

The three men instinctively ducked their heads. Hashknife and Sleepy grinned foolishly at each other, while the sheriff whirled his horse and rode closer to the foot of the hill.

"Hey!" he yelled. "What in —— do yuh think yo're doin' up there?"

From among the rocks lifted the head and shoulders of a man. He peered down at them, wondering, no doubt, what it was all about.

"*Spow-ee-e-e-e-e!*"

A bullet ricocheted off the rock beside him, and he ducked like a rabbit, while from farther up the valley came the roar of a black-powder rifle cartridge.

"What in —— is goin' on around here?" yelled the sheriff.

"Go up and muzzle that —— nester!" yelled the man behind the rock. "You dang near got me killed. Who in —— are you, anyway?"

"I'm the sheriff!"

"Oh, that's different. This is Corliss, Pete. Go up and stop that —— nester, will yuh? He's killed Oscar Naylor, and he's got Moon down in a coyote hole across the cañon."

"Yuh say he's killed Naylor?"

"An hour ago, yeah. Look out for him, Pete. That —— fool can hit yore belt buckle at half a mile."

No doubt this was a gross exaggeration of Scotty's marksmanship, but showed what Ben Corliss thought of it after an hour of swapping lead with him.

The sheriff drew out a none too clean white handkerchief, grasped it by one corner and turned to Hashknife.

"You better stay here, gents. This nester might 'a' gone crazy or color blind, and he sure can shoot."

"Better all three go," said Hashknife. "Take it slow, I'd say. Show him we ain't tryin' to rush him."

"Good idea. C'mon."

THEY went slowly up the road and soon came in sight of the little shack. The sheriff held up his flag of truce, waving it gently, while Hashknife and Sleepy rode one on each side of him, expecting any moment to have the nester fire upon them.

But nothing happened, and they dismounted at the gate. Several dead sheep were scattered around the yard, attesting to the fact that all the shots had not been fired at Scotty. Both front windows had been shot out.

"Hey! McLeod!" yelled the sheriff.

"And what would ye be wantin', wavin' your white rag and comin' slow?"

Scotty had stepped out from the rear of the house and was looking them over.

"Oh, it's the sher-r-riff, eh?"

"Yeah," nodded the sheriff, walking toward Scotty.

"Did ye silence thim br-r-rave cowpunchers?" he asked, waving one hand in the general direction of his enemies.

"They're all through, McLeod. What started all this?"

Scotty rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"Me sheep, sheriff. Several of thim got away, and the Five Box outfit killed 'em. Ben Corliss came with one of 'em on a r-r-rope, and he warned me to leave. He forced me to accompany him to the gate, and when I started back, his cohorts star-r-rted shootin' at me. I got in the house, took me gun and returned their fire. We've been at it over an hour now, so I guess there's been no harm done."

"Corliss says you killed Oscar Naylor."

"I don't know about that. We had it hot and heavy for a while. They've killed all me sheep, I think, and my house will leak like a sieve in the next rain."

"Give me your gun, McLeod," ordered the sheriff.

The Scot frowned slightly, but grinned as he handed the gun across.

"I'd as soon, sheriff. I shot me last cartridge a while ago."

He glanced toward the gate and his face hardened. Corliss was walking toward him, rifle in hand.

"You dir-r-rty pup!" gritted Scotty.

Corliss paid no attention to him, but spoke directly to the sheriff.

"Moon just yelled that he had found Naylor, and he's dead."

The sheriff sighed deeply and looked at Corliss.

"What's yore side of this, Ben?"

"Go ahead and lie," said McLeod.

Corliss scowled and started toward Scotty, but the sheriff stepped between them and held out his hand to Corliss.

"Give me yore gun, Ben. Yore six-gun, too."

Corliss handed over the two weapons, looking sharply at Hashknife and Sleepy, two men he had never seen before. The sheriff knew that Corliss was wondering who they were, but he was in no position to say.

"The nester's sheep got loose," explained Corliss. "You know how we feel about sheep, Pete. We stopped some of 'em and I roped one, which I brought down here with me. I told McLeod what I thought of a sheep-raising nester, and told him he better call it a day and pull out of here.

"I made him walk to the gate with me because I didn't want him too close to his rifle when I was ridin' away. As soon as I pulled out he ran into the house and started shootin' at us. Naylor and Moon were up there on the hill, and he got Naylor the first shot. Anyway, Moon says he got him with the first shot.

"Naylor didn't know that McLeod had run back for his gun, so he didn't have a chance in the world. I wasn't back to 'em when the shootin' started, and he drove me off that side of the valley. That's how I happened to be up there behind that granite cliff where yuh found me."

The sheriff turned to McLeod.

"How about it, McLeod?"

"Par-r-rt true, par-r-rt lies, sheriff. They were shootin' at me before I got back to the house. I was lucky to get in there alive. If Naylor didn't know the shootin' had started, he must have been deaf, because there were several shots fired before I got me gun, and there was more fired before I had any chance to take par-r-rt."

"Yo're a liar!" snapped Corliss.

"Drop that, Ben," warned the sheriff. "This is no place to discuss it—not between you and McLeod." He turned to McLeod. "I'm sorry, but I'll have to arrest you, McLeod. I'm not sayin' that you were not justified in what you have done, but a man has been killed, and that demands an investigation."

"I suppose so," nodded McLeod. "I'm not sorry, sheriff. They forced me to it, and if I killed a man, he had his chance the same as the rest of us. It was war-r-r, and no favors. Perhaps I'm sorry it was Naylor instead of Corliss, because I had no quarrel with Naylor."

"You'll hang just as high for Naylor as for me," said Corliss angrily.

"But with less satisfaction," replied Scotty coldly.

The sheriff turned to Corliss.

"You go back and help Moon bring Naylor's body down to the road. We'll saddle McLeod's horse and meet yuh there."

"All right, sheriff."

Corliss turned and hurried back, while the four men went to McLeod's little stable and let him saddle his own horse. Scotty did not complain, until the sheriff assured him that he would get a fair trial.

"Will I?" he asked coldly. "With a cattlemen's jury?"

"The sheep were against yuh, pardner," said Hashknife kindly. "That was yore mistake."

"I'll admit it," said Scotty. "I'm bull-headed. Since I've been here I've fought to live. The Five Box is a big outfit for one nester to fight. I was whipped a long time ago, but I didn't know it.

"I was a fool to bring the sheep. It was like takin' a big roll of bills from your pocket, placin' thim on the table behind your poker chips, tryin' to frighten a gambler. I wanted to make the Five Box fightin' mad," Scotty laughed bitterly. "I think I made a big success of it, too."

"And the witnesses are two to one," reminded Hashknife.

"Aye, that's true. But so was the shootin'."

"And yuh never can tell," agreed Hashknife smiling at Scotty's optimism.

They led Scotty's horse back to the other horses, where they all mounted and rode back down the little valley. Down near the spot where they had discovered Corliss, they found Corliss and Moon with the body of Oscar Naylor. Moon was a short, heavy-set cowboy, with a round face and an upturned, brown mustache.

THERE was a certain resemblance between the face of Jim Moon, nicknamed "Honey," and that of the usual artists' conception of the Man in the Moon. But Honey Moon was neither smiling nor beaming. He scowled heavily at Scotty McLeod and waited for the sheriff to speak.

The sheriff's examination of Naylor was brief.

"Dead as ——," he said coldly. "Rope him to his saddle and we'll go to town."

"Ain't yuh goin' to arrest that —— nester?" asked Honey Moon.

His voice was husky, high-pitched.

"Tub o' lar-r-rd!" snorted Scotty.

"The nester is under arrest," said the sheriff. "If you've got any remarks to make to my prisoner or about him, don't let me hear 'em. I've taken charge of him, Honey, and it's up to me to protect him. *Sabe?*"

"Oh, all right," grudgingly.

Hashknife liked Pete Darcey for that remark. It showed that the sheriff was playing square with his prisoner.

"And I want you boys to pack a message to Dutch O'Day," said the sheriff as they roped Naylor's body to his horse.

"You tell O'Day that I'm holdin' him responsible for anythin' that might happen to McLeod's few head of stock or to his little ranch while McLeod is in my charge."

"You don't think O'Day would bother his —— stuff, do yuh?" asked Corliss indignantly.

"No matter what I think, Corliss. You take the message."

"Oh, I'll tell him all right. But Dutch O'Day ain't a man who—"

"I'm not askin' for any pedigree, Corliss. I know O'Day as well as you do. I'm not makin' him responsible for only his own acts. I'm includin' the Five Box outfit."

"Oh, all right. Do yuh want me and Honey to go to town with yuh, Pete?"

"Not unless yuh want to."

"We better go," advised Honey Moon. "Naylor was my bunkie, and I want to see that nester behind the bars."

The sheriff tied-off his lash-rope, picked up the lead rope on Naylor's horse and mounted his own animal. Corliss had been rolling a cigaret, his eyes squinting inquiringly at Hashknife and Sleepy.

"Pete, who are these two men?" he asked abruptly.

The sheriff looked at Hashknife and Sleepy, frowned slightly and rubbed the back of his hand across his chin. He knew no more about them than Corliss did.

Hashknife grinned slowly and shifted in his saddle.

"We're the Smith brothers," he said easily. "I'm the tallest, and he's—" pointing at Sleepy—"the shortest."

Hashknife said it so earnestly that every one took it for granted until Scotty McLeod's sense of humor caused him to snort audibly. The sheriff turned his head and looked at his prisoner reprovingly.

"Friends of the nester, eh?" growled Corliss, who had misconstrued Scotty's snort.

"Yuh never can tell," said Hashknife seriously.

"Well, we better be movin' along," said the sheriff, and the cavalcade headed for Arapaho City.

Several times during the trip Hashknife caught Scotty McLeod looking at him, a grin on his lips. Scotty was evidently still amused at Hashknife's self-introduction.

When almost to town Hashknife spurred in close to the sheriff and told him of seeing Joe Lane fall from his horse and of their narrow escape from Hank Ludden's bullet. The sheriff listened closely, but made no comment.

"Do you know anybody around here?" he asked.

"Not a soul, Sheriff."

"Lookin' for work?"

"Nope. We might take jobs, but we're never lookin' for work."

The sheriff grinned and shook his head.

"I dunno what you'll be able to find around here, Smith. You sure showed up on a lively day. This is the most killin' we've ever had in one day. I know I've got to appoint me another deputy, dang the luck."

They rode in to the main street of Arapaho City and to the front of the sheriff's office. The word spread quickly, and they had hardly dismounted when men came running from all directions to stare at the cavalcade and ask questions.

They crowded around the body of Naylor, questioning the two cowboys from the Five Box, while the sheriff took Scotty McLeod through his office and locked him in a cell at the rear.

But the crowd could get no satisfaction from questioning Corliss and Moon, so they surrounded the sheriff when he came out.

"Back up, you fellers!" snapped the sheriff. "Some of the Five Box outfit got smart with McLeod, tha's all. Give me room to unleash that body, will yuh?"

"The nester killed Naylor?" asked one of them.

The sheriff did not reply, but busied himself with the ropes.

"Here comes Mrs. Lane," said one of the crowd, as if warning them. The talking ceased, and several men stepped off the sidewalk, glancing quickly at the tall, slender girl who was hurrying toward them.

She was wearing a kitchen apron over her white dress, and there was a smudge of flour across her nose and cheek.

She stopped short when the crowd moved aside and she could see the body roped to the saddle. The sheriff turned and looked at her, but his glance strayed quickly away and around the crowd as if looking for some one to help him handle the situation.

The woman came closer, her eyes wide with apprehension. She stumbled over a warped board, stopped. A breeze blew a lock of hair across her eyes and she brushed it back with a trembling hand. A man swore softly and moved away, going slowly across the street. Two more followed his example, glad to get away.

"Pete, what—is—it?" Mrs. Lane spoke haltingly.

The sheriff looked at her. His lips twisted painfully.

"This is—is Naylor," he said. "You knew Naylor, Mary."

"Yes, I—I knew him." Her voice was strained, hoarse with emotion as she came slowly forward to the edge of the sidewalk.

"I—I knew Naylor. You say that is Naylor? Somebody—" she tried to smile, choked—"somebody said it—it was Joe. But it wasn't Joe. It was Naylor. Oh, I'm sorry it—it had to be anybody."

"Yes'm." The sheriff looked appealingly around. This was making it worse. Some one had told her that Joe was dead, and now the shock would be just double. She was trying to smile, and he was going to tell her the truth. He moved toward her, came to the edge of the sidewalk, his hands clenched tightly.

"Mary," he whispered, "I've got to tell yuh the truth. I was intendin' to come right to yuh, right after it happened, but this other deal came up and I didn't have time. Joe got—"

The sheriff stopped and turned away. He could not bear to look at the expression of her face. She knew now. The smudge of white flour was not visible now. Her lips were compressed tightly and her eyes were staring vacantly into space.

HASHKNIFE stepped to the sidewalk beside her. He expected her to faint. She interpreted his move and looked up at him.

"Thank you," she whispered bravely. "I'm all right."

"You've got nerve," said Hashknife softly. "Keep hangin' on to it, ma'am."

"Where is Joe?" She turned to the sheriff, who was mopping his brow with a gaudy-colored handkerchief.

"They moved him down to the doctor's home," offered one of the men.

"Mary, you hadn't better go down there," advised the sheriff. "You wait until yuh kinda get over the shock."

"Get over the shock?" Her lips trembled and she choked back a sob. "How did it happen? Who did it?"

"Good ——!" muttered one of the men hollowly.

And while the woman waited for some one to tell her, the crowd drifted across the street, singly and in groups, leaving only the sheriff, Hashknife and Sleepy to tell her.

It was too much for the sheriff, who turned to Hashknife.

"Yo're a stranger here, Smith. For ——'s sake, take her away from here and tell her about it. If you'll do this for me, I'll never forget it."

"But—but what is it all about?" asked Mary Lane blankly.

Hashknife touched her on the arm.

"If yuh want to walk down to the doctor's office, I'll go with yuh ma'am. Mebby it'll be easier for me to tell yuh all about it."

Without any comment she walked with him, while the sheriff and Sleepy looked after them, thankful that Hashknife was game enough to accept the delicate task of explaining things to her.

"I think it was an accident." Hashknife could think of no better way to break the news to her.

"You mean, he was accidently—"

"Yes'm. Anyway, it looks thataway to me. Yore father was lookin' for rustlers, they tell me, and he runs into three of 'em. Somehow they got away from him, and after—"

"My God!" Mary stopped and stared at Hashknife. "You mean that my father shot Joe?"

"Well, I tell yuh I think it was an accident. Yore dad seen this man ridin' along and he—"

But there was no use in going farther, and he knew it.

"That's why they wouldn't tell me," she said painfully. "All those men walked away, looking so queerly at me. My own father shot Joe. He thought Joe was a rustler, and they—"

She shuddered and Hashknife grasped her arm.

"No, I'm not going to faint," she told him. "You are a stranger and you don't know about things. They all know that my father disliked Joe. They'll say that he killed him out of spite."

"I don't think your father would murder a man."

Mary Lane looked at Hashknife, her eyes filled with horror and pain, but her lips were firm now.

"No, he wouldn't murder," she said slowly. "He thought Joe was a rustler, and Joe can't prove he wasn't."

Hashknife shook his head. Two men were crossing the street from a hitch-rack, and Hashknife recognized one of them as Hank Ludden. The other was Armadillo Jones. Mary Lane saw them, and turned her head away.

They came to the edge of the sidewalk and stood together looking at Mary. Armadillo squinted at Hashknife, and there were tears in his eyes, or it might have been caused by the sun and the dust.

Mary looked up at Hashknife and said:

"I will go the rest of the way alone. Thank you for telling me, Mr. Smith."

She turned and walked away, not even looking at the two men. They followed her with their eyes until she turned the corner, going past the old blasted cottonwood which pointed a crooked forefinger skyward as if promising a retribution.

"You shore raised ——," declared Armadillo, slowly and distinctly. "Never even looked at us."

"Can yuh blame her?" asked Ludden hoarsely.

"Well, my ——, I never shot any of her relations!" retorted Armadillo hotly. "Jist because we're pardners, it ain't my fault if yuh shoot somebody."

Hank Ludden turned and walked slowly back toward the hitch-rack. Armadillo squinted at Hashknife and turned his head to watch Hank cross the street. After a moment he hitched up his belt, spat reflectively and followed Hank.

Hashknife went back to the sheriff's office. They had placed the body of Naylor on a cot. The bullet had torn its way through the man's body, making a wicked wound, but the sheriff was unable to say whether the man had died instantly or not.

"I seen Naylor fall," said Moon, who had come back to the office after Hashknife and Mrs. Lane had walked away.

"I wasn't far from him. We seen Corliss comin' back, so we swung around, intendin' to ride over the ridge, when all to once I hears the bullet hit Naylor.

"He didn't say anythin'—jist fell off. I swung my horse around to go back to him, but that —— nester started heavin' bullets so close to me that I unloaded off my bronc and dug myself in. My gosh, that jigger sure can shoot straight."

Hashknife and Sleepy went outside, and in a few minutes the sheriff joined them.

"Goin' to eat somethin'," he told them. "C'mon and have a bite with me. Have a cup of coffee or anythin'. I want to hear how Mary Lane took the news."

THEY walked down to the Pekin Café, where the Chinaman with the Irish name grinned at them and hastened to take their orders.

"I told the lady all about it," said Hashknife. "Yuh can imagine how she'd take it, can't yuh? But she didn't scream nor faint, if that's what yuh mean."

"She's got nerve," mused the sheriff. "Mary loved Joe Lane. I ain't never been married, but if I ever do, I hope my wife will like me as well as Mary liked Joe."

The sheriff sighed deeply and drummed on the table with his big fingers.

"This has been a hard day for Arapaho City. Two dead men, a broken heart and a man in jail."

"What will they do to the nester?" queried Sleepy.

"I dunno." The sheriff squinted gloomily at the wall. "The sheep will hurt his chances with a jury."

"Only twelve sheep," said Hashknife.

"Numbers won't matter, Smith. Sheep are hated in this country. If one of the Five Box had killed McLeod, it wouldn't be worth my while to arrest them, because any jury in this county would turn 'em loose.

"I had to arrest McLeod. Perhaps he wasn't to blame. I know those Five Box boys, and they're wild as ——. But I had to do it, as much to save him as anythin'. They'd go back and kill him sure. This way there's a chance for him to get off with manslaughter."

"Yuh spoke about Dutch O'Day," reminded Hashknife.

"Yeah. Dutch owns the Five Box outfit. He's a wizened, little old Irishman, with temper of the devil. Several years ago he got both legs broke in a runaway. Wheels went over both legs below the knee.

"The bones were crushed pretty bad, I reckon. Anyway, they didn't knit well. The doctor managed to save his legs, but little good it did him. He'll never walk. All day long he sits on the porch of the Five Box ranch-house and curses everything and everybody. Got a big Chink cook who carries Dutch where he wants to go, and takes care of him. Dutch curses Long How, calls him How Long, but the Chink just grins.

"Once in a great while Dutch comes to town. It ain't often. He thinks everybody is laughin' at him, but they're not, of course. Who would laugh at a cripple? His mind must be twisted a little over his trouble. He probably egged the boys in to makin' an attack on McLeod. Dutch has tried to force McLeod off that place, but didn't quite make it. Dutch wants that spring for a winter waterhole."

"Why didn't he buy McLeod out?" asked Hashknife. "It would be worth it to the Five Box, I'd think."

"Buy ——! Do you think Dutch O'Day would buy from a nester? Not that it wouldn't be the square thing to do, Smith. But the principle of the thing would be all wrong. If McLeod goes to the penitentiary, the Five Box will take back that spring, but I think O'Day is wise enough to order hands off until the case is settled."

"How many punchers does O'Day usually have?"

"Four. Oh, sometimes he puts on extra men. Corliss, Moon, Naylor and Dayne have been with him a long time. I dunno who he'll get to take Naylor's place."

"What kind of a feller is this Corliss?"

"All right. He's the foreman. You've got to credit him with havin' patience. Anybody that'll take orders from O'Day must have patience. He has to handle most of O'Day's business because O'Day can't get around. Corliss is all right. He's a darned good cowman, knows his business. Today is the first time he's ever got wild, and that was probably because he had orders from O'Day."

"I've never seen that Five Box brand," said Hashknife. "What does she look like, Sheriff?"

The sheriff took out the stub of a lead pencil and an envelope. He drew an oblong, three times as long as its width. Across this at right angles he drew another of the same proportions, which made a square center with the same size squares on each side. It might have been called a cross brand, except that all sides were of equal length.

"That's the Five Box brand," said the sheriff. "It was Dutch O'Day's own idea. He said he was goin' to have a brand that nobody could alter and get away with it."

"It sure looks like he'd got it," grinned Hashknife. "Most any rustler would balk at changin' that darned thing. I'd like to meet Dutch O'Day, Sheriff."

"The —— yuh would! Well, mebby you'll get a chance. We'll see that he comes in for McLeod's hearin', and you'll probably hear him at his very best. He can hate louder and harder than any man on earth."

"Any special person?" asked Sleepy.

"The one who just spoke to him last."

Hashknife and Sleepy grinned and leaned back to let Pat put their orders on the table.

"Yo' no like soup?" asked the Chinaman.

"Compulsory?" grinned Sleepy.

"Jus' same noodle today. I hear somebody get kill, eh?"

"Joe Lane and Oscar Naylor," said the sheriff. "Two dead men in town today, Pat."

"Shoot each othah, She'iff?"

"No-o-o."

"Whisky?"

"No-o-o."

"Hm-m-m! Ve'y solly fo' Joe Lane. Naylor owe me tlee dolla."

The Chinaman shook his head sadly and shuffled back to the kitchen. He didn't feel sorry for Naylor. He felt sorry for himself, and it would be difficult for another cowboy to get credit at the Pekin Café.

IT WAS two days later that McLeod's hearing was held, and in the meantime the "Smith brothers" had demonstrated to the poker-playing element of Arapaho City that they knew one card from another.

Corliss offered to take them on at the Five Box ranch, but they declined the jobs. It was all right with Corliss. He had told O'Day about them, and the old Irishman had told him to offer them the customary forty dollars a month.

About fifteen minutes before McLeod's hearing was to take place, Dutch O'Day came to Arapaho City, driving a wild pair of buckskin horses to a buckboard, while beside him sat a big Chinaman, clinging with both hands to the seat.

O'Day drove up in front of the War Paint saloon, jerked the horses back on their haunches and swore at the Chinaman for being slow in getting around to their heads. Hashknife and Sleepy were in front of the saloon, and they were willing to agree with the sheriff's description of O'Day.

He was thin to the point of emaciation, his bony shoulders threatened to tear holes in his colorless shirt, and there was not enough meat on his face to hide the contour of his skull. But his features were typically Irish, and Hashknife wondered if somewhere beneath that wormwood and gall there wasn't a spark of humor and kindness.

"Tie thim up, ye —— heathen!" he shrilled at the Chinaman who was fussing with a rope.

He twisted his head and glared at Hashknife and Sleepy.

"Who th' —— are ye starin' at, ye saddle-slickin' dummies?"

"You'd make anybody stare," said Hashknife coldly. "I've been told that yo're the meanest old —— in this country, but I think they're wrong."

"Ye do, eh?" O'Day leaned forward, his thin lips twisted in a snarl. "And jist why do ye think they're wrong?"

"They didn't cover enough territory, O'Day."

"Oh!" O'Day leaned back and squinted at Hashknife, his face twisted with impotent wrath. "Ye don't think they did, eh? By ——, if I was able to get out of this rig, I'd pay you out for that."

"If you'd been able to get out of that rig, somebody would have killed you a year ago. You've gained a sweet reputation, O'Day. Just because yo're a cripple you think you have the right to curse everybody, say what you please. But you haven't. Yo're just a little atom in the scheme of things. Hard luck has soured you, or you think it has, but down in yore soul is the wish that you could come back, that you could have the good will of every one, be a man among men in spite of yore condition."

O'Day listened to Hashknife, his mouth half open, as if to interrupt. But he held his tongue. The Chinaman finished hitching the team and had come back to the wheel. O'Day shifted his eyes from Hashknife to the Chinaman, squinting at him closely. Then—

"Did ye get thim tied, How Long? Ye did? Thank ye kindly. Now, if ye are ready, How Long, ye may assist me across the way."

The Chinaman looked curiously at O'Day. It was the first time that O'Day had ever spoken to him in that tone. It had always been with a curse. He leaned inside the buckboard, lifted O'Day easily and started across the street with him. And O'Day twisted his head, looked back at Hashknife and actually laughed.

"You see how easy it is, O'Day?" called Hashknife.

The smile snapped out like the turning out of an electric light.

"Go to ——, will ye?" snarled O'Day, and turned away to swear at How Long.

Hashknife shook his head, still smiling.

"I'm right, Sleepy. O'Day doesn't hate the world. He hates O'Day. He sits at his ranch all the time, knowing that he has made every one dislike him, knowing that no man can speak a good word for him. He can't get out and win back his friends. They won't go to see him. The bitterness of his soul is against himself, and he takes it out on the world."

"He's sure a perfect cross between a polecat and a badger," said Sleepy, who was very practical. "It's too bad the wagon didn't run across his neck."

There were only three witnesses examined at the hearing, Moon, Corliss and McLeod. It was a case of two witnesses to one; two men who swore that McLeod opened fire on them without warning, and that it was either the first or second shot that killed Naylor.

McLeod told his story in a straightforward way, but the law accepted the Five Box version, and Scotty McLeod was bound over to the superior court, charged with murder.

Hashknife walked back with McLeod and the sheriff, and when McLeod was again locked in his cell, Hashknife asked him to go over his story again.

"But I've told the truth," insisted McLeod. "I can't tell ye any more than I have."

"What's the idea, Smith?" queried the sheriff.

"I believe McLeod's story, tha'sall. I hate to see an innocent man sent up or hung. He has told his story. I've heard it twice, but I want to ask questions, if I may."

"It's all right with me," said the sheriff. "I can't make McLeod talk."

"I'll talk," nodded the prisoner. "Ask the questions."

"How did yore sheep get out?"

"Sure, I dunno that."

"I do. I was out there yesterday. The dead sheep are in the corral, and there's no way for a sheep to get out except through the gate."

"Ah-ha! So they turned me sheep out, eh?"

"Mebbe."

"You mean they wanted an excuse to start trouble with McLeod?" asked the sheriff.

"Somethin' like that. McLeod, you say they were shooting at you as you ran back toward the house?"

"Aye, several shots. I fell into the house, took me gun, fell out through a back window and went to the corner."

"Were they still shootin' at the house?"

"Aye, they wer-r-re."

"They tell me you're a good shot, McLeod. Did you draw a good bead on Naylor?"

"I dunno who he was. Corliss told me that his men were in the hills ready to kill me if I ran back for my gun. I could see some men. I dunno how many. I drew down on one who was on a horse, and I wasn't quite sure of my aim. It was a long ways."

"And you saw the man fall?"

"I did not. I saw a riderless horse, so I thought I had hit somebody."

"You didn't know how many men were in the hills?"

"I did not. I didn't know how many there were until it was all over, and you came with the sheriff."

"I reckon that's about all," said Hashknife.

"But that won't help McLeod any," said the sheriff. "Even if the Five Box boys did turn the sheep loose to get a reason for startin' trouble, it won't help McLeod much at this trial."

"Possibly not. But it shows that they intended to start trouble," Hashknife turned to McLeod. "Did you ever meet Dutch O'Day?"

"No, I never have. I've minded my own business, and I've had no occasion to go to the Five Box."

HASHKNIFE and the sheriff went back to the office. The sheriff sighed and sat down in a chair.

"Well, that much of it is over. This afternoon they bury both Naylor and Joe Lane. I was just wonderin'." The sheriff squinted at the ceiling. "Just wonderin' what interest you've got in this trouble, Smith?"

Hashknife slowly rolled a cigaret, lighted it carefully and inhaled deeply before looking at the big sheriff.

"You don't mind, do yuh, Sheriff?"

"——, no! But I was just wonderin' if you two happened to drift in here or were yuh sent here. Yuh don't need to answer it either way. Mebby I was thinkin' out loud."

"We drifted in," said Hashknife slowly. "Mebby there was a reason, but nobody sent us. A week ago we didn't know anythin' about the Twisted River country."

"Yore business is yore own," said the sheriff. "Excuse me for talkin' about it. Are yuh goin' to the funerals?"

"Nope. We didn't know either of 'em. And we're not morbidly curious."

"I reckon yo're right. I've got to go. Folks are talkin' about me and my rustlin' deputy, and I've got to stick with him to the last sod."

"You don't think the old man killed him on purpose, knew who he was, do yuh?"

"My ——, no! If you could have seen the look on the old man's face when he seen it was Joe Lane! No, Hank Ludden is no murderer. I'd bank on it, Smith."

Hashknife left the office and wandered up the street. Old Dutch O'Day was sitting in his buckboard, talking with Corliss. Hashknife saw them look toward him and exchange a few words. Then Corliss nodded his head and walked toward the door of the War Paint saloon.

Hashknife intended to ignore O'Day, but O'Day would have it otherwise, and called to Hashknife.

"How's yore disposition?" asked Hashknife.

"What in —— do you care?" retorted O'Day.

"I just wanted to know before I stopped, O'Day. I might throw a rock at a peevish old badger, but I'd not stop and waste words with him."

"Come back here!" snapped O'Day. "You're the first —— man I've seen in a year that had guts enough to tell me where to head in."

Hashknife came back and leaned against a front wheel.

"Corliss offered ye a job, didn't he?" asked O'Day.

"Yeah," indifferently.

"Mebbe ye don't want a job."

"Mebbe not."

"Ah-h-h-h-h!" O'Day cleared his throat angrily. "Ye'r too —— cool! That —— heathen pair o' legs of mine has gone down to the Pekin Café to ta-alk Chinese wid another of the same breed, and I'm left here to the mercy of every gallinipper that—that—" O'Day spat viciously and glared at Hashknife.

"Why don'tcha smile for a change?" asked Hashknife. "I'd be a little careful at first, if I was you 'cause it'll wrinkle yore face the other way and might break the skin."

O'Day glared with impotent wrath, his hands clenched in his lap. But as Hashknife had surmised, back of his bitterness was a spark of humor, and it was forced to the surface.

"Ye almost made me laugh," he said, choking a trifle.

"I'm not tryin' to make yuh laugh. I'm tryin' to make yuh think, O'Day."

"Think?" O'Day stared at him and his face twisted with bitterness. "My ——, man, what do ye think I've been doing since I lost me legs? Think? Ha, ha, ha, ha! That's all there is left for me to do—think."

Hashknife turned his head and looked at Hank Ludden and Armadillo Jones who were crossing the street from a hitchrack.

"I'd rather be in your fix than in Hank Ludden's," said Hashknife softly.

"Ye'd rather? And why would ye, man?"

"He killed his daughter's husband."

"I know he did. Joe Lane was a rustler."

"No matter what he was, O'Day. They say that Ludden worshipped his daughter. She married against his wishes and he has never been to see her. She loved her husband enough to give up her father, and he killed her husband. Ain't that worse than not bein' able to walk? Yore pain was physical, O'Day. Any ache in yore soul has been put there willingly by you."

O'Day turned his head and squinted at Ludden, squinting thoughtfully. Then he turned back and nodded.

"Perhaps you're right," he said slowly. "God knows I've hurt no one except with my tongue. I wonder does the man realize what he has done."

"I think so, O'Day. I watched his face the other day when his daughter passed him, by. I felt the pain in it myself, and I'm kinda salty. And the pain won't pass like the pain of a physical hurt. But I don't think he'll curse the world for something that he can't help."

"Here comes my Chinese legs," said O'Day softly. "I hope he had a good visit with Pat Ling."

The big Chinaman came up to them, looking inquiringly at O'Day, waiting for his orders.

"We'll be going, How Long," said O'Day, and then to Hashknife— "If ye care to, come out to the Five Box, Smith. If ye need a job for you or your pardner, come and get it. I'm glad I stopped ye when I did. So-long."

Hashknife stepped closer and held out his hand. O'Day hesitated, glanced around, as though wondering who might see it, and grasped Hashknife's hand.

"The first handshake in years," he said huskily. "Perhaps it's because ye are a stranger. No, by ——! Ye knew what I am—was—and ye—" O'Day turned to the Chinaman. "Don't drive too fast, How Long. Me legs are hur-rtin' me."

Without another glance at Hashknife, O'Day drove away. As far as Hashknife could see them, O'Day had not turned his head. Hashknife stepped on the sidewalk in front of the saloon and leaned against a post, rolling a cigaret.

Arapaho City was getting ready for the double funeral. Down in front of the livery stable, a man was washing the antiquated hearse, its two remaining black plumes standing askew on opposite corners of the equipage. As Hashknife watched the cleaner, another man brought out two gray horses which they proceeded to hitch to the hearse.

Several men were going around the old cottonwood heading for the doctor's home where the services were to be held. Rigs were arriving regularly, but were turning off to the right before reaching the main street.

Across the street from Hashknife, sitting close together on a bench, were Hank Ludden and Arapaho Jones. The proprietor of the general store came out, wearing his cutaway coat and an antiquated derby hat. He locked the door, glanced quickly at the two men on the bench and hurried up the street.

THE hearse went past, rattling badly from disuse, the two gray horses swinging away from each other as the driver checked their natural tendencies to go fast. The two old men watched the hearse turn the corner, but it seemed to Hashknife that neither of them spoke to the other.

Sleepy came from the saloon with Honey Moon and Corliss, followed by Dayne, a skinny, bow-legged cowboy, who carried his left arm stiffly bent at the elbow, as though about to strike at something or somebody. His nose had been broken at some time, giving him a disk-faced appearance.

"Goin' to the funeral, Smith?" asked Corliss.

Hashknife shook his head.

"Nope, I'm not curious."

"I ain't goin' either," said Sleepy.

"We've kinda got to go," said Honey Moon dolefully. "Yuh see, Naylor ain't got no relation, not that we know about, and it ain't a reg'lar funeral unless somebody mourns. Naylor was a good feller and he deserves a send-off."

"C'mon," grunted Dayne. "Let's git it over with. I'm glad Dutch O'Day didn't decide to go to the funeral. He'd likely cuss the minister before it was over with."

The three cowboys went down the sidewalk, rattling their spurs, mounted their horses at the hitch-rack and rode around the corner. The sheriff came up the opposite side of the street until he noticed the two old men on the bench, when he crossed the street and came up to Hashknife and Sleepy.

"I didn't want to pass 'em," he told Hashknife. "I got close enough to see old Hank's face, and that was enough for me."

"I guess that's right," nodded Hashknife.

"Well." The sheriff sighed deeply. "I reckon I've got to go and set on the mourner's bench, boys. These things ain't so easy for me."

"You won't be on the mourner's bench," said Hashknife. "It's over there in front of the store."

"I reckon yo're right at that. So-long."

The sheriff went on, his Sunday boots creaking a protest. Hashknife rolled a fresh cigaret, his expression deadly serious as he spread the tobacco carefully along the crimped paper. Sleepy glanced at him and began rolling one for himself.

"I'm ready," said Sleepy seriously, "to add my quit-claim deed to that other one on the Arapaho City signboard. Anybody can have my share of the —— thing."

Hashknife shook his head, squinting thoughtfully, the unlighted cigaret hanging to his lower lip. Slowly he drew a match from his pocket and snapped it to a light with his thumb nail.

"We can't leave now, Sleepy. I can't go away and remember them two old men over on that bench, and that white-faced woman. I'd always be lookin' back, wonderin', you know, Sleepy."

"Yeah, I know, cowboy."

"And there's a letter I've got to answer."

"When?"

"Just as soon as I find his address."

Sleepy nodded and hitched up his belt, indicating the saloon door with a jerk of his head.

"All right," said Hashknife. "I need one just now."

They went into the War Paint. There were only two human beings left on the main street of Arapaho City; two old men who humped together on the little bench, straining their eyes toward a spot beyond the old cottonwood where they could see the first few rigs of the funeral procession, lining up for the cemetery trip.

THE next day Hashknife and Sleepy rode out to the old U6 corral. The sheriff had given them directions, and they had little trouble in finding the place, as an old road, nearly grown up with weeds and brush, led from the main highway to where the old ranch-house once stood.

A few Five Box and HL cattle were at the old waterhole, and a magpie chattered at them from a high pole of the corral. They drew up beside the old fence and Hashknife glanced at his watch.

"It took us almost an hour to reach here, Sleepy," he remarked.

"That's prob'ly a world's record," said Sleepy dryly.

"What'll we do now? Go back to Arapaho and brag about it?"

Hashknife replaced his watch and ignored Sleepy's sarcasm.

"All right, I'll give us three cheers," grinned Sleepy.

They went around to the corral gate, looking for evidences of the branding fire, but there was none.

"Tracked out or wiped out," said Hashknife.

He squinted at the top of the ridge from where Hank Ludden had first seen the rustlers at work.

"That must be where the old man's horse came out and put the rustlers on the run," said Hashknife. "It's too bad he came alone after them."

"It's too bad he came at all," replied Sleepy. "He'd 'a' saved himself a lot of misery by stayin' home that day. What'll we do next?"

"From what the sheriff said, the HL ranch must lie almost due north of here. So we'll kinda angle out through the hills and visit old man Ludden. I'd like to have a little talk with him."

They circled to the left of the butte and headed north, riding slowly. After the first mile the hills were more open, covered with a fairly good growth of bunch-grass and dotted here and there with live-oak, the creek bottoms heavy with cottonwood and a few sycamores.

Cattle grazed on the open slopes of the hills, stopping their feeding to gaze with deep suspicion upon the two riders. In each group there seemed to be one or two more suspicious than the others, and these would start running away, followed by the rest.

"There's a lot more Five Box than HL's," observed Hashknife as they skirted the side of the bunch-grass hill. They came out on the crest and drew up to scan the country to the eastward.

They were high enough up to locate Arapaho City and to see the hills behind Scotty McLeod's place. Between them and Arapaho City was the green, snake-like line of Twisted River which swung in southeast, passing close to the Five Box ranch.

They rode down the ridge, crossing the head of a deep cañon and came out on a flat mesa which led them out to a view of the Hard Luck ranch far down in the mouth of the little valley, its elevated position making it plainly visible.

Hashknife led the way, following the higher ground until they struck the slope which led down to the ranch-house. Old Armadillo was in the yard greasing a buckboard. He had a smear of axle grease on his chin, and his hands were gobby with the same substance in spite of the fact that he was using a stick to apply it to the axle.

He paid no attention to their approach and did not look up until several moments after they had stopped beside him. Then he straightened up, placed the grease can and stick in the buckboard and felt tenderly of his back.

"Gittin' so —— old that I squeak," he said. "Been puttin' off greasin' that dinged e-quipage f'r a long time, jist 'cause it creaks m' back. Gittin' old, I reckon. Gittin' old jist like that —— buckboard. But nobody can grease me and take out the squeaks.

"Well, are yuh goin' to set there or are yuh goin' to git down and give them horses a rest? Yore names are Smith, and yo're brothers. Howdy. I'm Armadillo Jones, meaner 'n —— and as dangerous as a sage-rabbit."

The two cowboys dismounted and shook hands gravely with Armadillo, trying not to laugh. Then he handed them a rag to wipe their greasy hands with, and they all laughed.

"Where's Ludden?" asked Hashknife.

"Hank? He's up at the house, settin' there." Armadillo spoke the last two words softly and looked toward the house.

"You know about it, don'tcha?" he asked.

"Yeah, we know about it," said Hashknife.

"Uh-huh," thoughtfully. "Well, I dunno. Hank was younger 'n me before this happened, but right now I'm a yearlin' beside of him. Don't want nothin' to drink nor eat—jist sets."

"Hit him hard, eh?"

"Jist like a ton of brick with a muzzle ve-locity of ten thousand feet per second. Wait'll I hook that —— wheel on and I'll go up with yuh. Mebby it'll do him good to hear a strange voice."

Hashknife helped him put on the wheel and they went to the front of the house where they found Ludden sitting on the porch, slumped down in a chair, a dead pipe between his lips. He turned his head and looked at Hashknife and Sleepy.

"Hank, these here are a couple of Smiths," said Armadillo. "Gents, I make yuh used to Hank Ludden."

"Don't get up," said Hashknife, holding out his hand.

Ludden shook hands listlessly and waited for them to say what they wanted of him. Armadillo scowled at Ludden.

"Well, good ——, Hank!" he blurted. "This ain't no way to meet anybody. Shake yoreself, can'tcha?"

"Please don't, Armadillo," replied Ludden. "I—I reckon I was half asleep when yuh came up—dreamin'."

"That's all right," smiled Hashknife. "We just dropped in to say howdy and see how things are goin'."

"To see how things are goin'?"

"I can tell yuh they ain't goin' worth a ——," said Armadillo.

"Shucks, that's no way to look at it," grinned Hashknife. "Remember that every cloud has a silver linin'."

HANK LUDDEN turned quickly.

"Not every cloud. Not some clouds that I know, Smith."

"Let's forget the clouds for a while, Ludden. Did you ever hear of a man named Hashknife Hartley?"

"Hashknife Hartley? Why, I—I—"

"Yo're —— right yuh did!" snorted Armadillo. "Last Spring yuh—"

"Yes, I knew of a man by that name. I wrote him a letter. But what has that to do—"

"You wrote to him at Calumet?" interrupted Hashknife.

"Yes, that was the town."

"It's funny I didn't get it. We just left there a short time ago."

"Nothin' funny about it," said Armadillo. "Hank wrote on the envelope, 'After ten days return to Hank Ludden, Arapaho City,' and that's what they done."

"Are you Hashknife Hartley?" asked Ludden.

"That's me."

"Hm-m-m-m," Ludden stared at him closely. Then if you didn't get that letter, how did yuh know I wrote to yuh?"

"Mebby, I'm a mind reader," smiled Hashknife. He did not want to tell them about the other letter.

"I don't believe it!" snapped Armadillo. "No —— man can read yore mind. But," he added seriously, "that kinda fits in with what Amos Hardy told yuh, Hank. He said that Hashknife Hartley was worse'n a palmist, when it comes to puttin' the deadwood on a rustler or a killer."

"Amos Hardy, eh?" Hashknife smiled. He knew Amos, the big, roly-poly cattle-buyer for an eastern packing house.

"Know him, don'tcha?" asked Armadillo.

"Yeah, I know Amos. But we haven't seen him for over a year. It seems to me that you wanted me to come out and take charge of the HL ranch."

"Did we?" Ludden's teeth gripped tightly on his pipe stem. "If you didn't read my letter, how in —— did yuh know what we wanted?"

"Mind readin'," drawled Armadillo dryly.

"Hardy told him," declared Ludden.

"We haven't seen him for over a year," reminded Hashknife.

"Mind readin' " reiterated Armadillo. "But what difference does it make how he found it out, Hank? We're in a —— sight worse hole than we was in April."

"No one was ever in a worse hole," gloomed Ludden.

"Job had boils and the whale swallered Jonah," offered Hashknife seriously, and Armadillo laughed.

"Yuh can draw a boil to a head, and I never did believe that whale yarn no more'n I believe yo're a mind reader. It ain't none of my business how yuh found out that Hank wrote yuh a letter last Spring, and I don't give a ——."

"That's the spirit," grinned Hashknife. "Where was yuh when Amos Hardy told yuh so much about me?"

"Right here on this porch."

"Thasso? Who was present?"

"Me and Hank and Hardy."

"Nobody else heard what he said, eh?"

"Not a soul."

"Hardy came alone," nodded Ludden.

"Is Hardy well known around here?"

"Ought to be." Thus Armadillo. "He's been buyin' beef in the Twisted River country f'r years. Shows up about a twice a year."

"Any other buyers?"

"——, yes! But Amos is so well known that he gets what he wants. He used to buy quite a lot from us, but lately we ain't sold none."

"And a —— good reason for not sellin'," added Ludden.

"Where do yuh ship from—when yuh ship?"

"Casco. We have to drive twenty miles to a railroad. It's all good travelin'. They've been sayin' that a branch is to be built in to Arapaho, but I don't reckon it ever will. The railroad intended to come in thisaway, but they couldn't get out of this pocket without goin' out through Crow Rock Cañon, and that'd cost a lot of money. So they swings to the east from Casco and misses this spur of the Twisted River mountains."

"What towns are between here and Casco?"

"Bend and Lone Tree. It's about eight miles to Bend, five from Bend to Lone Tree and about seven from there to Casco."

"Cattle raised all up the valley?"

"Yeah. Little alfalfa raised, but mostly stock. All small outfits, the JME, K8, 103, Box X, Diamond Z, and 7 Bar 9."

Hashknife drew out pencil and paper and asked Ludden to enumerate the brands again, while he drew them out on the back of an old envelope.

"I told yuh in my letter that I wanted yuh to take charge of the HL," said Ludden earnestly. "That still holds good."

"This proposition has gone past that stage," replied Hashknife, pocketing his envelope. "You need a man at large, not in charge. Has anythin' ever happened to cause yuh to think that Joe Lane was a rustler?"

Ludden sighed heavily and shook his head.

"No, Hartley. It was an awful shock to me. I don't reckon I'll ever get over it. I know I'll never notch a sight on another human bein.' They can steal all my cows if they want to."

"By ——, they can't steal mine!" snorted Armadillo. "I could pot-shot the rest of the world and never hit a relation of mine. Ain't got none. Paw said he was the last bud on the fambly tree, and he married an orphing. I'm the result, Armadillo Jones, meaner'n ——!"

"What will yore daughter do now?" asked Hashknife of Ludden.

"—— only knows. They ain't got much. Joe's salary was enough to keep 'em, but there's no salary now. I dunno what she'll do, Hartley."

"Couldn't yuh induce her to come back here?"

"Here?" snorted Armadillo. "Why, she won't even speak to us!"

"She'd be welcome, wouldn't she?"

"Welcome?" Armadillo pronounced the word softly and looked at Ludden. "Jist like rain is welcome in July when the whole range smokes from the heat—when the water-holes are all dry and the cottonwood leaves curl up on the tree. That's jist how welcome she'd be at the HL."

"That's welcome enough," said Hashknife. "We'll mosey on back to town, I reckon."

Armadillo urged them to spend the rest of the day and have supper with them at the HL, but Hashknife explained that he was too busy to attend social functions.

"Social, ——!" snorted Armadillo. "Don't let that part of it stand in yore road."

"I dunno what there is for yuh to do," complained Ludden. "I killed Joe Lane for stealin' cattle, and there ain't enough HL cattle left to make much difference. There's two rustlers left, and they'll be smart enough to keep quiet for a while."

SLEEPY argued that side of the case with Hashknife as they rode back to Arapaho City, but got little satisfaction out of it. Hashknife had told Sleepy about his conversation with Dutch O'Day, and their talk drifted to Scotty McLeod.

"They'll sure send him over the road," declared Sleepy. "A cattle jury won't give him a chance, and that's the kind of a jury they'll draw here. Somebody was sayin' that Lane and McLeod were pretty good friends."

"Thasso?" Hashknife squinted thoughtfully. "Huh! I wonder if—"

Hashknife squinted at the sun, estimating the time of day. Perhaps it was easier than taking out his watch.

"Wonder if what?" queried Sleepy.

"Just wonderin'."

They rode across the rickety old bridge over Twisted River, and were almost to Arapaho City when they met the sheriff.

"I was just goin' out to the HL," he told them. "Got tired of settin' around and thought I'd go out and talk with Hank and Armadillo a while."

"We just came from there," said Hashknife. "I was thinkin' about ridin' over to

McLeod's place and takin' a look around."

"Yeah? McLeod's place, eh? Wasn't yuh out there day before yesterday?"

"Uh-huh. But I didn't go in the house."

"Didn't yuh? Hm-m-m-m. What do yuh expect to find in there?"

"Nothin'."

The sheriff shifted in his saddle and spat reflectively.

"Nothin', eh?" he mused, his keen eyes searching Hashknife's lean features. Then—

"Smith, who are you, anyway?"

"One of the Smith brothers," seriously.

"——!" The sheriff expressed his disbelief explosively. "Names don't mean nothin'. You ride in here on a wave of crime, turn down jobs, help me take a man and then go pokin' around like a danged detective lookin' for a clue. Mebby yo're just the Smith brothers, I dunno. But I don't mind tellin' yuh that I ain't the only one in Arapaho City who wonders who in —— yuh are."

Hashknife grinned and produced the makings of a cigaret.

"Smith is as good a name as any," he said slowly. "Our own names won't mean anythin' to yuh, Darcey. Nobody sent us here, nobody is payin' us for what we're doin'. We're just what we look like—two driftin' punchers.

"We busted in on two killin's. Nobody can tell us what we want to know, so we go huntin' for the answer. If we find it, we'll let yuh know. If we get killed, it's our own fault."

"Fair enough," nodded Darcey. "If yuh don't care, I'll ride to the McLeod place with yuh. But if yuh think yuh can clear McLeod, you've got a job on yore hands."

"I hadn't thought much about it," grinned Hashknife. "Was Joe Lane friendly with McLeod?"

"Well, yeah. McLeod is a likable Scotchman if yuh don't rub him the wrong way. Joe liked him. McLeod has traveled quite a lot and Joe liked to talk with him. But what does that mean?"

"If Joe Lane stole cows, he didn't do it alone."

"Oh-ho! And yuh think—I see. But there was three of 'em."

"Mebby we can find out who the third one was, Sheriff."

"Mebbe," hopefully.

They turned to the right near Arapaho City and cut across the hills to McLeod's cabin. No one had bothered to bury the sheep, and the odors were none too inviting.

The cabin doors were unlocked, swinging half open. They went in and looked around. Most of McLeod's few belongings were in the rear part of the building. His bed had been carefully made.

On the rough table a million ants were making merry with an open can of syrup, and the top of the stove was covered with coffee-grounds from the last brewing which Scotty had been forced to ignore.

There was no furniture to speak of. An old trunk with a broken lock, covered with an Indian blanket, stood near the head of the bed, used as a table. Hanging on nails near the head of the bed was a well worn pair of overalls, an old black coat and a battered sombrero hat.

Hashknife walked around the room, examining things, while the sheriff and Sleepy watched him. He lifted the lid of the old trunk and examined the few things within it, a gray coat and vest, a nearly new pair of boots, some old odds and ends of wearing apparel.

Hashknife closed the trunk and lifted the old black coat off the nail. In the inside pocket he found a miscellaneous bunch of old letters, bearing British stamps. Hashknife did not read these letters. But among the envelopes was a folded sheet of paper, which almost escaped his eye.

He unfolded this and scanned the short, penciled note, which read:

> Have them thear at east end of Crow Rock canyon next Friday sure don't try to run as menny as last time and go easy.

Hashknife smiled softly and handed the paper to the sheriff, who read it blankly, while Sleepy looked over his shoulder.

"What do yuh make of it?" asked the sheriff.

"Hey!" snorted Sleepy. "Ain't that the same writin' as in that letter you got, Hashknife?"

Hashknife laughed and nodded his head. The sheriff looked gravely at Hashknife and handed back the note.

"So that's yore name, eh? Hashknife Hartley?"

"I didn't suppose you'd ever heard of me," said Hashknife.

"I have. Yuh see, I've been a sheriff for almost four years, and we do hear things once in a while. Was you sent here by the cattle association?"

"Nope." Hashknife drew out the letter he had received in Calumet and handed it to the sheriff.

"Compare the writin'," suggested Sleepy, which they found to be identical. The sheriff read the letter and listened as Hashknife told him about Hank Ludden's returned letter. The one he received, of course, had no return address.

Then Hashknife told him that Amos Hardy had suggested to Ludden that he get in touch with Hashknife Hartley.

"Well," said the sheriff gravely, "I'm glad yuh came. But you better not tell anybody who yuh are, Hartley. This letter sure is a warnin' that yuh can't disregard."

"It didn't scare me much. The man who wrote me that letter ain't never quit lookin' for me to show up here, and I'll bet he knows who I am right now."

"Do yuh think so? Huh. Who do yuh think wrote it?"

"That remains to be found out. How far is it from here to Crow Rock Cañon?"

"About three miles. The cañon cuts plumb through the range, and it's about two miles through. Do yuh reckon this letter was Scotty McLeod's instructions on movin' cattle?"

"Can yuh think of anythin' else he might take through the cañon? It tells him to not run as many as before and to go easy. Must be somebody over there who takes 'em off his hands."

"Sure," nodded the sheriff. "It ain't far from the east end of the cañon to McCallville. I'll betcha Scotty runs a bunch through the cañon at night, turns 'em over to somebody at the other end of the cañon and they handle 'em from McCallville."

"And today is Thursday," mused Hashknife. "This letter tells him to have 'em there on Friday. The question is, what Friday did he mean? Is it tomorrow or was it last Friday, two, three, four weeks ago tomorrow? No date on the letter, nothin' to show when the cattle were to be moved."

"Makes it kinda tough," agreed the sheriff. "But it sure puts McLeod up against some hard travelin'. He'll have a hard time explainin' away that note."

"McLeod says he had been to town the mornin' that Lane was killed. He told us about that part of it, Sheriff. If he can prove that much, it'll help him. A man can't be in two places at the same time."

"Not if it can be proved, Hartley. But you know it would only take about forty minutes for a man to make the ride from Arapaho City to the old U6 corral. McLeod won't be able to find a man who can swear within an hour of the time he was in Arapaho, because his being there wouldn't be of enough interest for any one to make a note of it."

"Is there any one who can swear what time Joe Lane left Arapaho City and where he intended to go?"

"Joe told me he was goin' out to the Five Box ranch to look at a horse. One of the boys out there has a three-year-old sorrel that Joe liked, and Joe wanted to buy it. But I've no idea what time Joe left town.

"His time was mostly his own. I never pinned Joe down to regular hours. I have no home, so I spend most of my time at the office. He was usually where I could find him."

"Did he ever talk much about the rustlers?"

"No more than the rest of us did, Hartley."

"How did he feel toward Hank Ludden?"

"He felt that the old man had too much sense to stay mad all his life. Joe didn't hate Ludden. At least, he never seemed to. He wanted Ludden to be friends with Mary because he knew it hurt Mary for the old man to feel as he did. Joe liked old Armadillo Jones, meaner'n ——."

THE sheriff laughed as he quoted Armadillo's description of himself. Hashknife grinned and walked to the door where he examined a bullet scrape along the casing. Then he crossed the room, took out his pocket knife and dug out a battered 30-30 bullet which had barely buried itself in a seasoned board.

"Thirty-thirty," said Hashknife, tossing the bullet to the sheriff. "McLeod swore they were shootin' at him as he ran for that back door. It kinda looks like he might have told the truth."

Hashknife went outside and looked for more evidence. In the doorstep was another bullet hole, and in the door-frame was embedded a pebble the size of a small marble which might have been driven in by a bullet striking the ground short of the door.

He showed these to the sheriff, who nodded gravely.

"It looks like McLeod told the truth," he admitted. "But how would a jury look at it, Hartley? There's nothin' to prove when those shots were fired. It might have been months ago."

"No, that's right. Well, we might as well go home."

The sheriff secured some nails and fastened the doors tight. There was nothing in the place which might tempt a thief, but the sheriff thought it would look better to have the doors nailed shut.

Back at their room in the Arapaho hotel, Hashknife stretched himself full length on the bed and stared at the ceiling, while Sleepy proceeded to play solitaire with an old dog-eared deck of cards on the little table.

For an hour there was no conversation, no sound except the soft riffling sound as Sleepy shuffled the cards or when Hashknife moved slightly, causing the bed to creak. Then Hashknife said aloud—

"We can get to the east end before dark."

"East end of what?" Sleepy lifted his head quickly.

"Crow Rock Cañon."

"Oh, yeah."

"We'll borrow a couple of rifles from the sheriff. Put up them cards, cowboy."

Hashknife twisted off the bed and reached for his hat.

"If anybody brings a cow through that cañon, we'll be there to welcome 'em, Sleepy."

"Friday jist means tomorrow to you, does it?" wailed Sleepy.

"We can't be there last Friday," retorted Hashknife.

The sheriff was willing to lend them the guns and ammunition, and insisted on going along, but Hashknife persuaded him to stay at home.

"It's a hundred-to-one shot that we don't see anybody," said Hashknife. "If there's a man over there to receive the stock, he's prob'ly heard that McLeod is in jail, so we'll have our trouble for nothin'. If there is a man there—well, two of us will be as good as an army."

Crow Rock Cañon was visible from Arapaho City, and the sheriff gave them directions as to the easiest way to reach the west end of it. They had Pat, the Chinaman, make them each a sandwich, which they tied inside their slickers, purchased some extra cartridges for their 30-30 rifles, and rode out of town.

MARY LANE had just begun to recover from the shock of losing her husband, and the cold, hard facts of existence were staring her in the face. It had just occurred to her that she had no visible means of support, except her father.

Joe had not been of a saving disposition. She did not know how much money there was in the bank in his name, but she did not imagine it to be any great amount. Joe's last month's salary had paid for the funeral, leaving her a few dollars extra.

She had tried to forgive her father for what he had done, but found it impossible to do so. He had shot Joe for a rustler, and Mary would gamble her soul that Joe had been honest.

To her it seemed that her father had merely used this as an excuse to kill Joe.

"And I'm the wife, the widow of a dead thief," she told herself bitterly. "That's what they say about me. He shot Joe in the back. Never gave him a chance."

She stared at herself in her mirror; stared at her own white face with the dark-circled eyes, as if she was looking at some one she had never seen. A few days had changed her from a laughter-loving girl to a tragic-faced woman.

She hated to leave the house, to be seen on the street. None of her old friends had been to see her, and she knew it was because Joe had been labeled a rustler. An officer of the law, a thief!

Her mind only ran in circles when she tried to plan a future. But she had a definite idea of leaving Arapaho City. Just where she might go or what she might do was indefinite. Much depended on how many dollars Joe had left for her.

It was shortly after Hashknife and Sleepy had ridden out of town that she came to the bank. Dutch O'Day and Long How had just driven in and were stopped in front of the bank. The little, wizen-faced Irishman squinted closely at Mary as she walked past, going into the bank.

Long How went in, spoke to the president of the bank, who came out to him. O'Day's account was worth a certain amount of service. He had come in to draw cash enough for his payroll. It was the first time he had ever talked with the president of the bank and did not curse some one.

The president went in after the required money, and it was several minutes later that he came out with it. He seemed preoccupied. Through the open door O'Day had seen him in conversation with Mary Lane.

As he went back, Mary Lane came out. She stood on the threshold of the bank, deep in thought.

"How do ye do, Mrs. Lane," said O'Day abruptly.

She looked up quickly. It was the first time he had ever spoken to her, although she had known him for years.

"Quite well, thank you, Mr. O'Day," she said, hardly realizing that she had answered him.

"Ye're not!" he declared. "Don't fib about it."

Mary Lane almost laughed. It seemed ridiculous for Dutch O'Day, the meanest man in the Twisted River country, to talk so to her. He was smiling at her, and she remembered that O'Day never smiled.

"No, ye're not all right," he told her. "Come over closer to me, Mary Lane. Ye see, I can't come to you."

She came closer, wonderingly.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"For me?"

"Yes, Mr. O'Day."

O'Day rubbed his chin and blinked thoughtfully.

"Did Joe leave ye any money?" he asked.

Mary shook her head.

"I'm afraid he—he didn't have much to leave."

"No, I suppose not. Will ye go back to yer father?"

Mary stared at him for a moment and shook her head.

"No," she said.

"Ye haven't talked with him?"

"No."

"Hm-m-m-m," O'Day cleared his throat raspingly. "Mary Lane, I dunno just what to say. Ye see, I—" he rubbed his chin violently— "I was just thinkin' that—well—it, here ye are:

"The Five Box has no women. We're a rough lot out there. But if ye want a home I'll give it to ye. I've plenty, and I've no chick or child to spend it on."

"Oh, that is awful good of you, Mr. O'Day," said Mary, and she meant it now. She had ceased to be astonished at O'Day. "But I couldn't do that. I can get along some way. But I want you to know I appreciate your kindness."

"I know, Mary Lane. Only don't forget that the offer still stands as long as ye might need it."

He turned abruptly, picked up the lines and swung the team out into the street, leaving her there staring after him. He drew the team to a stop in front of the sheriff's office and spoke to Long How, who grinned, got out and went toward the Pekin Café, glad for a chance to talk with one of his own race.

O'Day squinted back up the street. Mary Lane was turning the corner, going home. The sheriff came to his doorway and nodded to O'Day. They had never been good friends because of O'Day's vitriolic tongue.

"How is everything, Pete?" asked O'Day kindly.

"All right, O'Day. How is everythin' with you?"

"Fine. I was just talkin' with Mary Lane, Pete. She's up against a tough deal. Joe left her little or no money, I suppose."

It rather shocked the sheriff to hear O'Day speaking of other people's troubles. He wondered if O'Day was sick or had gone crazy.

"Well, I don't suppose Joe did leave much," admitted the sheriff slowly. "In fact, I don't reckon he left anythin'."

"Ye know —— well he didn't!" It was a return of the old Dutch O'Day. "These —— young fools git married and—but—" he squinted at the sheriff and grinned widely— "We were all young once, Pete Darcey. If they'd have killed me in me twenties, I'd left nothin'."

"It's the nature of humanity," said the sheriff, wondering at the sudden change in the man.

"What salary did Joe Lane get from this county, Pete?"

"Hundred and ten dollars a month," replied the sheriff.

"And he still has about fourteen months left of your two-year term. Hm-m-m-m. Have ye an indilible pencil, Pete?"

Wonderingly the sheriff gave him the required article, and watched O'Day take out his check book and begin to write.

HE FINISHED the check and looked up at the sheriff.

"There's no chance of gettin' the county to pay anything to the widow of a dead deputy, is there?" he asked.

"Hardly. Perhaps if he had been killed in upholdin' the law, O'Day. But Joe wasn't."

"To —— wid the law! The man is dead, ain't he? His widow never stole any cows. Here, Pete."

He handed the sheriff a check for fifteen hundred dollars.

"Put that in the bank and pay her a hundred and ten dollars every month."

"But she won't take it, O'Day. You don't know her."

"Tell her that a kind-hearted county paid it to her, Pete. She can't refuse it then. Keep my name out of it. Tell her not to say anything about it, 'cause the county don't want it generally known. Ye'r working for a kind-hearted county, and ye don't know it."

The sheriff looked at the check and squinted at O'Day.

"Dutch O'Day," he said slowly, "what in —— happened to you?"

"None of ye'r —— business, Pete Darcey! It's me own money and I can do as I like wid it, can't I? But if I hear that you ever told anybody about that check, I'll ride ye down the first time I catch ye in the street."

"And I'll stand still and let yuh, O'Day. Just now I'd like to shake hands with yuh."

The big, muscular hand of the sheriff enveloped the scrawny, brown hand of O'Day, the meanest man in the Twisted River country, and they shook gravely. Then O'Day drove down to the Pekin Café, where he humped over in his seat to wait until Long How got through talking with Pat Lee, the other Chinaman of Arapaho.

The sheriff went in his office, spread the check out on his desk, and sat down to try and figure out what had happened to Dutch O'Day to cause him to give away fifteen hundred dollars to some one he did not even have a speaking acquaintance with.

But the sheriff was unable to arrive at any logical conclusion except that possibly Dutch O'Day had a hunch he was going to die and wanted to spend some of his money. Anyway, he decided, it was a fine thing for O'Day to do, and there was no question of Mary Lane's need.

He decided to bank the money and tell Mary that the county had ordered the bank to issue her a monthly allowance instead of having the county treasurer issue the usual voucher check.

So he picked up his hat and went to the bank. It was just at closing time, but the cashier was willing to delay his departure to accomodate the sheriff.

"Here's a check for fifteen hundred dollars," stated the sheriff, producing the slip of pink paper. "You credit that to the account of Mary Lane, and give her one hundred and ten dollars a month as long as it lasts."

The cashier looked at the check, nodding his head, as he turned back to his desk.

"You merely want us to issue that amount per month, eh? No explanation needed, I suppose?"

"I'll explain to her."

He wrote out a receipt and gave it to the sheriff, who went outside and started for the office, meeting Armadillo Jones.

"Yo're the feller I want to see," grinned Armadillo. "You know how the county does things, Pete. Listen t' me, feller. I'm danged if I was goin' to see Mary Lane starve, *sabe*? So I went to the bank a while ago, drawed fifteen hundred dollars of my own money, handed it back to 'em, and fixed it up so's they'll pay Mary one hundred and ten dollars per month for the rest of Joe's unexpired term.

"I fixed it up for them to tell her that the county was payin' her Joe's salary, but for her to keep quiet about it, as it was kinda irregular."

Armadillo laughed softly and shuffled his feet.

"I didn't let Hank know a danged thing about it. Anyway, it's my money and I can do as I —— please with it. I got away from Hank, and it didn't take me long to fix things. Ha, ha, ha, ha! Pretty good, eh?"

The sheriff tried to grin, but failed.

"Yeah, that was pretty good, Armadillo. She—uh—sure needs the money."

"Sure thing. But here's what I want you to do, Pete. If she knowed it was from the HL outfit, mebby she wouldn't take it. So I want you to kinda let on that there's a chance of the county payin' her sort of a pension. Will yuh do this?"

"Eh? Oh, sure." The sheriff rubbed his chin nervously, wondering what Mary would say when she received two hundred and twenty dollars. The thought flashed through his mind that he might intimate that they had doubled Joe's salary.

"Well, that's fine," said Armadillo. "I'll buy a drink."

"Thanks, Armadillo, but I ain't got time right now. Mebby a little later, eh?"

"Aw, sure. See yuh later, Pete."

Armadillo bow-legged his way across the street. Hank Ludden was crossing the street farther up, and they met in front of the War Paint saloon, where they entered together.

"——'s delight!" snorted the sheriff. "I better think up a good lie to tell Mary, and I can't think a-tall."

He walked back past the bank and headed for the other end of town, intending to have a talk with Mary. A tall, thin man came from inside a hallway, and the sheriff recognized him as being the county treasurer, a slow-spoken, clerical sort of a person.

"Hello, Sheriff. I was hoping to see you."

The treasurer of Arapaho county hitched up his trousers, drew out a handkerchief and blew his nose violently.

"Wanted to see me?" Thus the sheriff indifferently. He did not care a great deal about the treasurer.

"Yes. The—er—treasurer's office has agreed to—er—do something which is probably irregular, and we will need you to sort of pave the way, as it were.

"Henry Ludden handed us his check for fifteen hundred dollars today, from which we are to pay Mary Lane the salary received by her lamented husband. It is supposed to be paid by the county, otherwise the said Mary Lane might not agree to accept it. And in order that she may understand it, I want you to intimate that the county is going to pay Joe Lane's salary to her for his unexpired term. Do I make myself plain?"

Pete Darcey yanked his hat down over one eye, while his five-fingered right hand dug deeply into the back of his head, his eyes half-closed, his mouth open.

"We felt sorry for the old man," explained the treasurer. "It is irregular, of course, but—you'll know what to say to her, Sheriff. You don't mind, do you?"

"——, no!" The sheriff leaned against the side of the building and watched the treasurer go briskly down the sidewalk.

"Three of a kind and a joker," he wailed. "My ——, I s'pose I might as well be good and —— for a three hundred and thirty lie as to be an ordinary liar for a third of it."

IT WAS supper time when Hashknife and Sleepy rode in at the little town of McCallville, if it might be designated a town. It was what might be termed a half-street town, as the three buildings were all on the same side of the road—the McCallville hotel, part of the lower floor being the general store and postoffice, the McCallville saloon and the McCallville restaurant.

About two hundred yards away from the town was the depot, a little box-like affair, and farther to the north was a big loading corral. McCallville was not an interesting place. From the lack of paint, repairs and general activity, it was plain to see that the population was not progressive or public-spirited.

The two cowboys rode out to the depot, tied their horses to a telegraph post and sauntered around to the door. The depot agent, a cadaverous looking, weary-eyed man, was asleep in his chair, an open pocketknife in one hand, a piece of pine board in the other. He had whittled himself to sleep.

The sound of their boot heels awoke him, and he squinted sleepily. Hashknife leaned through the ticket window and grinned widely.

"Hyah was?" said Hashknife.

"Awright. Whatcha want? Ticket?"

"No-o-o. Just drifted in to see if yuh know anybody that's goin' to ship some cows soon. We're lookin' for a free ride."

"Shippin' cows!" The agent spat disgustedly. "There ain't been a cow shipped from here since it became fashionable for 'em to wear horns."

"Thasso? Pshaw, I heard that lotsa cows was shipped from McCallville."

"Was, but ain't no more. Not for a year or so. Somebody sure lied heavily to yuh, friend. If any cows was shipped from here, I'd sure know about it. I'm high, low, jack and the game around this misnamed shippin' point."

"Yeah, I reckon yuh would," admitted Hashknife. "We've been lied to, it seems."

Hashknife thanked him for the information and they rode down to the loading corrals. To all appearances the corral had not been used for a long time. The hinges *of the gates were rusty and the loading* platform, a movable piece of planking which was used to connect the loading chute with the cars had been lying in the weeds for months.

"If Scotty McLeod and his friend stole HL cattle, they sure didn't ship 'em from here," declared Sleepy.

Hashknife shook his head and climbed back on his horse. It was growing dark, and they went back to the hotel, where they ate supper. Only two other men entered the hotel, and from their conversation it was easy to see that they were in business.

After supper they went to the McCallville saloon, where they bought some cigars, only to throw them away later on, and talked with the bartender. To him Hashknife told the same tale he had told to the depot agent.

"Ain't been shippin' nothin' from here," replied the bartender. "Town is on the bum. You fellers ought to go up to Casco. They ship once in a while, and yuh might get a chance to travel with 'em."

"Didja ever meet a feller named Scotty McLeod?" asked Hashknife.

The bartender took this under advisement.

"Nope. I knowed a feller by that name in Iowa. He died before I left. It must be a different McLeod."

"Prob'ly is," said Hashknife seriously. "This one has red hair."

"It's a different one then. Mine had white. He was eighty years old. What are yuh goin' to have?"

They named their choice. Another man, one of the diners, came in and joined them at the bar. He was the proprietor of the general merchandise store and was not adverse to accepting a drink.

For possibly half an hour they stood at the bar, talking about McCallville which, according to the storekeeper, was on its last legs. Some horsemen went past, bridle chains jingling, the horses going slowly.

The bartender walked to the window, drew aside the curtain and looked out.

"Who was it?" asked the merchant, as the bartender came back.

"I didn't get a look at 'em. Don't think they stopped."

"Ain't much travel through here, eh?" queried Hashknife.

"Not much," replied the merchant. "I'll buy now."

"You want the same, gents?" asked the bartender.

Sleepy shook his head quickly.

"I don't like to be particular, but I don't like that kind of liquor."

"This kind?"

The bartender picked up the bottle rather indignantly and shook it viciously.

"Yeah, that's it."

"Sa-a-ay, don'tcha know good liquor when yuh taste it? That's twenty year old, pardner. Ol' Crow, by golly!"

"Thasso?" Sleepy's eyes opened wide. "That accounts for the feathers I've got in my mouth. They ort to pick their crows before they bottle 'em."

"There ain't no feathers in this stuff, y'betcha. Look at it."

He handed the bottle to Sleepy, who squinted through it at the light.

"Jist as clear as a—"

Crash!

The bottle exploded into a thousand pieces, spraying them all with broken glass and liquor, while from out in the street came the report of a gun. The heavy glass bottle deflected the bullet into the back-bar, where it smashed a few more bottles and splintered a corner of the mirror.

For a second they were all paralyzed. The next second they were all on the floor. Hashknife flung himself backward toward a card table, where he landed sitting down with a gun in his hand.

Steadying himself on his left hand he proceeded to shoot out the hanging lamp over the bar, plunging the saloon in darkness. There was only a few seconds space between the smashing of the bottle and the putting out of the lamp.

"He-e-e-ey! Quit shootin', you —— fool!" yelped the bartender.

He probably thought both shots had been fired from outside. Hashknife squinted toward the street, across which he could see only the skyline of the hills.

"Shot at me," he decided. "Mebbe the window glass deflected it a little. Bullet goes past my neck and busts up that bottle." Then aloud—

"Sleepy!"

"Present," grunted Sleepy. "I'm settin' on the merchant. How are yuh, bartender?"

"Down low," replied the bartender. "And I'm goin' to stay low, too. I've got a sawed-off shotgun in my hands, and I'm sure goin' to be generous with buckshot if anybody fools around me."

"Somebody must 'a' had it in for you," observed Hashknife.

"Me?" The bartender snorted indignantly. "Who in —— do yuh reckon wanted to kill me?"

"You prob'ly gave somebody a drink of yore Old Crow," snickered Sleepy. "A feller can't be too careful in this day and age."

"Mebby it's funny to you, but it sure ain't to me."

"Nor to me." Thus the merchant. "Some of that glass cut me in the face. Can't we light a lamp?"

"After I get out," said Hashknife quickly.

"No lamp," declared the bartender. "I don't suppose there will be another lamp lit in this place tonight. Tomorrow I'm goin' away and I ain't comin' back."

"Think you'll go back to Iowa?" asked Sleepy.

"Some'rs back there. Say, why don'tcha go out and see if that assassin is still there."

"C'mere and give me yore riot gun," said Sleepy.

"Yea-a-ah? If I wanted a riot gun very bad, I'd sure have ambition enough to go and git one. I may have to come out some time, but that ain't right now, pardner."

HASHKNIFE slid back against the wall, walked to the front of the room and peered out through the broken window. The light was good enough for him to see that there was no one in the street in the immediate vicinity of the saloon.

"I reckon the storm is over," he told them. "Nobody in the street."

He walked outside and looked around. Several people were standing in front of the hotel, and now they came down toward the saloon, questioning Hashknife. Sleepy and the merchant came out, and Hashknife left it to the merchant to explain what had happened.

The men from the hotel were unable to throw any light on the situation. Hearing the voices, the bartender came out, still carrying his riot gun. He locked the door behind him and announced that the McCallville saloon was closed for repairs.

"Was they shootin' at you?" asked one of the men.

"Yuh danged right!" The bartender was emphatic. "If one of these men hadn't shoved a bottle of hootch between me and that bottle, I'd be a lily holder right now."

"I had a hunch to do it," said Sleepy seriously.

"We're bunched up too much," said one of the men, turning back toward the hotel. "I'd hate to be mistaken for the bartender."

"That's the way I feel," laughed Hashknife.

He started toward the hitch-rack, and Sleepy followed him, while the rest of the men headed toward the hotel.

They mounted and rode north, until they were out of sight of the street, when they swung east again, going slowly, riding knee to knee.

"That was close, Sleepy," said Hashknife softly. "It missed my neck by an inch. I was leanin' forward."

"That's right. You was at my left, and the bullet came from yore left and behind yuh. What's the answer, Hashknife?"

"The man who wrote me that letter, Sleepy. The same man who wrote the instructions to Scotty McLeod."

"The dirty bushwhacker!"

"Sh-h-h! He prob'ly knows he missed, and he's out here somewhere waitin' for another chance."

"What's our next move?"

"Go through Crow Rock Cañon in the dark, cowboy."

"Holy cats! Suppose he lays for us in there? We ain't got a ghost of a chance in there, Hashknife."

"We have at night. In the daylight he could pick us off. If he works close he can't be sure. We'll just have to ride with a gun in our hand. It'll be as dark as the inside of a stovepipe for two miles."

"And expectin' every minute to get a shot in the dark."

"Mebbe. Anyway, I've got a scheme that might help us. It sure is lucky we've got a pair of broncs we can depend on."

There was no moon. They had ridden in over sort of trail from the east end of Crow Rock Cañon, but they did not know where that trail was now. Ahead of them, sharply etched against the horizon, was the U-shaped cleft in the mountains, where nature had cut a canal-like cañon completely through the range of mountains.

There was little variance in altitude in the floor of the narrow cañon, which was principally of solid rock, although here and there a slide had filled in enough soil to start a growth of jack pines.

In places it was barely wide enough for a single rider to pass between the rocky sides, and again it would attain a width of fifty feet or more. Nature had provided a pass through the Twisted River mountains and then proceeded to fill it with snow in the winter and slides in the spring, which precluded any chance of it ever being a popular pass.

They reached the mouth of the cañon and stopped to give the horses a breathing spell. The last half mile had been a heavy grade, over rocks and through thickets. Behind them the hills sloped sharply toward McCallville, but the valley was only a black bowl, unlighted by the few faint stars. Ahead of them were the steep rocky slopes where the breeze whispered through the pines, and the ink-like blot of Crow Rock Cañon.

Hashknife dismounted and tied his reins loosely to his saddle-horn.

"We're goin' to herd 'em through, Sleepy," he said softly. "Tie up yore reins. In that cañon the devil himself couldn't tell whether a horse carried a rider or not. We may lose a horse, but that's better than losin' a life."

"It sure is." Sleepy dismounted and fixed his reins. "Two miles ain't far to walk. Shall we pack our rifles?"

"Nope. A six-gun is enough, Sleepy. All set?"

They led their horses to the mouth of the narrow cañon, where Hashknife put his horse in the lead and clucked to him sharply. A moment later the mouth of the cañon was empty, and only the slither of hoof and boot came from the inky depths to show that men and beasts were passing through.

There was no possibility of fast traveling. The lead horse picked his way slowly around the rocky turns, while Hashknife and Sleepy traveled within reach of the second horse.

They were unable to see anything. In that deep cleft even the faint starlight was cut off. It was like traveling through the bore of a great tunnel. There was no conversation except an occasional grunt when one of them came in sharp contact with a corner at one of the right angle turns.

They were possibly a third of the way through the cañon, when Sleepy's horse stopped short and both men bumped into it. A quick investigation showed that Hashknife's horse had also stopped.

For possibly ten seconds neither man moved. It was plainly evident that there was something ahead of the horses. Touching Sleepy on the arm, indicating for him to stay where he was, Hashknife worked his way slowly past the horses, whispering softly to them. At the head of his horse he stopped and tried to penetrate the darkness, listening closely. But there was only the soft murmur of the breeze from high up on the cliffs.

Then he moved slowly ahead, one arm outstretched. Suddenly his hand came in contact with a wire which had been stretched across the narrow cañon, and before he realized what he was doing he pulled sharply on it.

From just ahead and to the right came the flash and report of a gun. Hashknife ducked low, jerking at his gun, while from around the horses came the slither of Sleepy's boots on the rocks as he shoved past the startled horses.

"Hashknife!" he called sharply.

"All right, pardner," replied Hashknife. Sleepy came in beside him.

"Did you fire that shot?" he asked.

"Nope," Hashknife chuckled softly and guided Sleepy's hand to the wire. "Feel that."

"For gosh sake! Barb wire, eh? They came through ahead of us," whispered Sleepy. "Where did that shot come from?"

"I'll tell yuh in a minute." Hashknife worked his way along the wire and found where it circled a small jack pine. He ducked under the wire and followed it a few feet, where it ended at a piece of the broken ledge.

Working his fingers down in the ledge he managed to dislodge a short revolver, around the trigger of which had been looped a single strand of the wire. He came back along the wire to Sleepy and squatted down on his heels while he explained about the set-gun.

"I happened to be lookin' toward it and seen the flash go up. Bushwhackers don't usually shoot in the air, Sleepy."

"All right, cowboy. But what does it mean?"

"It was meant to stop us. They felt sure our horses would stop at the wire. We'd get off and run into it, shootin' off the gun. *Sabe?* And that would stop us from goin' ahead, 'cause we'd feel sure that a reception was bein' planned for us. They want us to be in this cañon at daybreak."

"Which would give them a sweet chance to pick us off from the sides, eh? Let's go."

It did not take long to remove the wire, and they started on, hardly knowing what to expect now. But nothing impeded their progress. After what seemed an interminable length of time they came out of the cañon, mounted quickly and rode down the slopes toward Arapaho City.

It was still too dark for any danger of ambush, so they traveled southwest past McLeod's cabin, and struck his road to town.

ARAPAHO CITY was in darkness. They stabled their horses and went to their room at the hotel, where Hashknife produced the revolver which he had taken from the rock crevice, and they examined it.

It was of a cheap make, brightly nickeled, and of .38 caliber. Only one cartridge had been placed in it. And on the bottom of the butt, evidently engraved with great care, were the initials S. McL.

"Scotty McLeod's gun, eh?" mused Hashknife, as he lighted a cigaret over the chimney of the lamp.

"—— fool to put his initials on a gun!" snorted Sleepy.

"But he didn't set it," grinned Hashknife. "The man who set it didn't expect us to take it along. We'll talk with McLeod in the mornin'."

"But what I don't see is this— What good did it do us to go to McCallville, Hashknife?"

"Well, we met some nice people, got shot at, collected a nice, shiny gun and got home safe. What more would yuh want in one evenin'? I feel that we've been entertained, Sleepy."

"Tha'sall right. I appreciate their efforts and all that, but what do we gain by it? There wasn't any chance of McLeod takin' cows through Crow Rock Cañon tonight. I don't believe there has been any cows through there. Wasn't any sign of cows through there.

"If you went to McCallville to get shot at, yuh sure got yore wish. An inch further to the left, and you'd be of no further use to me. But I don't see what good it done yuh."

Hashknife grinned slowly, as he drew off his boots.

"I just wanted to find out if they was waitin' for Scotty McLeod or for me."

"Do yuh know now?"

"Well," grinned Hashknife, "of course, there's always a chance that they were shootin' at the bartender. But the bartender never had any idea of comin' through Crow Rock Cañon tonight."

"He's prob'ly half way to Iowa by this time," laughed Sleepy. "He'll brag about that all the rest of his life, and I'll bet he'll tell it so many times that after while it'll be one of the biggest killin's ever pulled off in the west."

"Prob'ly wear his hair long and call himself 'Two-Gun Ike' or somethin' like that," grinned Hashknife. He had taken off his boots and was examining a blister which he had contracted in his two-mile walk. Sleepy rolled into bed with a sigh of relief.

"It's a wonder to me that they didn't do somethin' to our horses," said Sleepy. "They were the only two at the hitch-rack in McCallville."

Hashknife shook his head quickly.

"It looks as if they saw a possible chance to kill or cripple one of us there in the saloon. And if they failed to do this, the fact that they shot at us in there might cause us to wait until daylight. What they wanted us to do was to ride through that cañon in daylight."

"Yuh mean they wanted to pot-shoot us in that narrow pass?" asked Sleepy.

Hashknife nodded quickly, "It looks like it to me. I'm just wonderin' if they wasn't playin' a cinch game."

He got off the bed and walked to the corner of the room, where they had left their rifles.

He examined one of them closely, opening and closing the action, investigating with his finger. Then he took the other one and gave it the same inspection. Then he stood it against the wall, walked back to the table, blew out the lamp and rolled into bed.

"It's a good thing we didn't do battle with 'em, Sleepy," he said seriously. "They plumb ruined the firin'-pins on both of them rifles."

"The —— they did! Can yuh beat that?"

"I'm goin' to try and do it, Sleepy."

"Uh-huh. Say! Were them pins all right when we got the guns from the sheriff?" The idea was so good that Sleepy sat up in bed.

"That's a question I've been askin' myself."

"Oh, ——!" Sleepy subsided heavily.

"I'm always late. By golly, I'll bet that when Gabriel blows his horn and says, 'Sleepy Stevens, come forth,' I'll come fifth."

"I'm glad you thought of it, anyway, Sleepy."

"Oh, so am I. I gave you a chance to swipe my thunder."

"Good night, Sleepy."

"I thought of that quite a while ago myself. Good night."

THE following morning Amos Hardy, cattle buyer, arrived in Arapaho City on his semi-annual buying trip. Amos was short, fat, with a big, smiling face, a typical good-natured fat man, but with an uncanny judgment concerning the weight and worth of cattle.

He wended his way to the Arapaho Hotel, where he ate his breakfast, after which he went to the War Paint saloon to renew old acquaintances. Amos was a mixer, a hail fellow well met. He shook hands with the bartender, bought a handful of very bad cigars, and listened to the news of the Twisted River range.

The bartender knew it all, and Amos Hardy soon knew as much as the bartender.

"Joe Lane dead, eh? Lucky Joe. Hm-m-m. Gosh, that's too bad. I didn't know this Naylor. McLeod, I didn't know either. And Hank Ludden killed Joe Lane, eh? That's bad. How's Joe's widder? All right? Pretty girl. She won't be a widder long.

"Is Hank Ludden still runnin' the Hard Luck ranch? He is? Stick there in spite of it all, eh? Huh! Well—" Hardy shifted his cigar and puffed thoughtfully—"this kinda looks as though the hard-luck still sticks to the HL. Have yuh seen old Dutch O'Day lately?"

"He was in the other day. We don't see much of him."

"Mean as ever, I suppose. I never was out to see him but once. My, my! Boy, he's got the worst tongue I ever heard. He cursed me in and he cursed me out. I wouldn't go out to see him if he'd give me a trainload of cows."

And so Amos rambled on, getting a few drinks under his wide belt and acquiring plenty of local knowledge which would be food for conversation later on.

He was beginning to shorten his drinks when Corliss rode in from the Five Box and came to the War Paint.

"H'lo, Corliss," greeted Amos. "How's the cow business?"

Corliss laughed and shook hands with him.

"O'Day was sayin' yesterday that it was about time for you to be showin' up, Hardy. How are yuh, anyway?"

"I'm jus' right, old-timer. Have a drink. I'll bet that ain't all that O'Day said about me."

Corliss laughed and shook his head.

"I reckon he don't like you, Hardy. But don't let that bother yuh."

"Nothin' bothers me," expansively. "As long as he'll sell me good beef he can cuss me and be darned to him. Well, here's to the pit of your stomach and may it never rust out."

And while Amos and the foreman of the Five Box drank to each other—including, of course, the bartender, who bought every third time—Hashknife and Sleepy had breakfast at the Pekin Café, after which they took their rifles to the sheriff's office.

The sheriff was anxious to hear what they found at Crow Rock Cañon, and Hashknife told it to him in detail, showing him the revolver which carried McLeod's initials. Then he opened the rifles and pointed out the disabled firing-pins. It had only taken a few moments work with a screw driver to put both rifles out of commission.

"Uh-huh." The sheriff nodded thoughtfully. "Hartley, yo're not buckin' ignorance in this. They're not overlookin' anything."

"Except that we're still alive," added Hashknife.

"Yeah, that's true. Let's go back and have a little talk with Scotty. He's eatin' breakfast."

Scotty greeted them with a smile and came up to the bars, carrying his cup of coffee.

"How are they treatin' yuh?" asked Hashknife.

"Very well considerin' my position in the matter."

"I was just wonderin' if you owned a six-shooter, McLeod."

"A six-shooter? No, ye wouldn't call it that. I've a five-shooter."

"Nickel-plated .38, with yore initials on the butt?"

Scotty nodded quickly, squinting at Hashknife.

"Ye've been in my tr-runk, it seems."

Hashknife laughed softly.

"You hadn't ought to put yore name on a gun. It might cause yuh trouble."

"That gun shouldn't cause any one trouble. Ye couldn't hit the wall of a house at ten paces with it."

"I reckon that's true," grinned Hashknife. "I found it in Crow Rock Cañon yesterday."

"Ye did? My gun?" Scotty shook his head. "I've never been in Crow Rock Cañon in me life and I've never carried that gun anywhere. It wasn't worth carryin'."

"Yuh never was in Crow Rock Cañon, eh? Never went through to McCallville?"

"Never," Scotty shook his head. "I've never been in McCallville in me life and I've had no occasion to go to Crow Rock Cañon although I know where it is. If ye'r not jokin' with me, some one must have searched through me trunk and took the gun. I'm sure it was there just before I was arrested."

"I guess they did," agreed Hashknife.

Back in the office the sheriff shook his head.

"I'm thinkin' that Scotty is an awful liar. I haven't mentioned that note to him, and he'll probably lie when I do."

"Probably," agreed Hashknife. "We'll just have to wait and see what happens next."

They left the office and wandered to the War Paint saloon, where they ran into Amos Hardy and Corliss. Hashknife would have given much to have known that Hardy was in town so that he might have avoided him, but it was too late now.

Hardy was expansively drunk, and he yelped with delight when he caught a glimpse of Hashknife and Sleepy.

"——'s hinges!" he yelped, shoving away from the bar, his fat face wreathed in a smile, his legs a bit uncertain. "Hashknife, you old bed slat! Welcome to our reception! Sleepy, you old hedge-hog! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! Shake uncle Amos' paw and say yuh feel pleased to meet him. Greeting and salutations."

He wheezed and pawed at them, stepping on Sleepy's toes in his exuberance of joy.

"Keep yore feet down!" growled Sleepy. "Ain't the rest of the world wide enough for yuh without walkin' on me?"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" Amos guffawed widely and tacked back to the bar, waving both hands at Hashknife and Sleepy.

"C'mon and get it. Ha, ha, ha, ha! By golly, it sure is fine to meet a friend. Yessir, it sure—"

He squinted at Corliss, shut one eye tight and turned his head to look at Hashknife.

"Misser Corliss," he said solemnly, "I want you to meet Misser Hartley and Misser Stevens. Gen'lmen, thish is Misser Corliss. He's foreman of the Five Box."

Hashknife shook hands with Corliss, a half-grin on his lips, and Corliss laughed.

"Smith brothers, eh?" he chuckled.

"Smith brothers?" Amos squinted at Corliss.

He was not so drunk that all reason had fled.

"He-e-ey!" he snorted. "What in —— have I done now?"

"Killed the Smith brothers," laughed Hashknife.

"Oh!" Amos goggled drunkenly. "Is it all right?"

"Sure." They stood at the bar and had their drinks.

"That Smith idea was sort of an inspiration," laughed Hashknife.

"A man has a right to a name," said Corliss. "Let's have another."

ONE more was just one too many for Amos, and Corliss took him across the street to the hotel, where he registered for Amos and put him to bed.

"I sure hope the deaths of the Smith brothers won't cause a fallin' off in the Hartley and Stevens families," said Sleepy as they sat down in the shade of the saloon porch.

"It won't hurt none, Sleepy. The men who were lookin' for us already knew us, so the rest of the bunch don't matter. I'd like to know who Amos talked to about us after he spoke to Hank Ludden about writin' that letter to me."

"Probably won't remember."

Corliss came back from the hotel and joined them.

"I tucked Amos in his little bed," he grinned. "Meetin' him almost made me forget what O'Day told me. He said if I met you fellows to tell yuh to come out and see him."

"What's the idea?" asked Hashknife.

"I'll be darned if I know, Hartley. Of course, you haven't known O'Day very long and you wouldn't see any change in him, but somethin' has gone wrong with the man.

"I've kept my job because I was able to stand for his disposition. For years, ever since he got hurt, he's been the meanest old —— on earth. Nothin' suited him. He'd cuss yuh for doin' wrong and he'd cuss yuh for doin' right.

"There was only one satisfaction, and that was the fact that we could get away from him. He cursed everybody, everythin'. Even subscribed for several newspapers so he could get somethin' to curse about.

"Sent east for one of them air-rifles so he could shoot the dogs. Shoot a horse just to see it jump, and then laugh about it. He wanted to hurt somethin'. No one ever came to see him the second time.

"But now—" Corliss shook his head slowly—"' I dunno what's the matter with him. He don't swear any more. Not even at How Long, the Chink. Asked us to come up to the ranch-house and play poker with him. Honey Moon won forty dollars from him last night, and O'Day never even swore about it.

"Honey thinks the old man is goin' to die. I tell yuh it's pretty noticeable when How Long sees it. He don't *sabe.* I asks him what he thinks and he says:

" 'No *sabe.* Long time, nobody good. Plenty mad. How Long cook bad, dlive bad. —— Chinaman not worth kill. Swear plenty from evelything. Now, How Long velly good cook, dlive nice. No swear at How Long. Say 'please.' Yo' *sabe?* How Long velly good Chinaman. Like fine.'

"And that's how the Chink feels about it, Hartley."

Hashknife grinned.

"Mebby he got tired of bein' bad."

Corliss grunted shortly.

"Mebbe."

"I'd just as soon ride out and see him," said Hashknife. "It sure must be a novelty to have O'Day ask yuh out there."

"Novelty, ——! It's a shock. If yuh want to go out right away, I'll be ready as soon as I get the mail."

Hashknife and Sleepy got their horses and rode away with Corliss. He seemed a different man than he was the day they met him at Scotty McLeod's place after the killing of Naylor. Except for the broken nose, Corliss would have been a good looking man. The muscles of his big torso rippled beneath the thin shirt, and he held his body straight in the saddle.

The talk drifted to Scotty McLeod's troubles as they passed the old road which led to McLeod's little shack.

"I dunno what you fellers thought of us that day," said Corliss. "It kinda looked as though we had started somethin' we couldn't finish, didn't it? You know how cow men feel about sheep, even a few sheep. It was like a slap in the face.

"I'll admit that I was a little sudden." Corliss laughed. "It was worth it to see the expression of that nester's face when he seen the sheep on the end of my rope. I made him walk to the gate with me. I figured I could get out of sight before he could get back to the house and grab his rifle, but I was all wrong.

"He went back there like a scared rabbit goin' to a hole, and it was only about ten seconds until he was throwin' lead. And he's a good shot. Moon and Naylor were further back on the hill. They thought everythin' was all right."

"About how far did he have to shoot at Naylor?" asked Hashknife.

"I dunno. Must 'a' been between two hundred and two hundred and fifty yards—mebbe more."

Hashknife nodded. He had estimated it at about that distance.

"I have heard that Joe Lane was very friendly with McLeod."

"I dunno much about that," said Corliss. "Joe Lane was all right. Bein' a deputy sheriff kinda swelled his head, but outside of that he was all right, I reckon."

"Did you ever suspect Joe Lane of rustlin'?"

Corliss shook his head quickly.

"No. I don't suppose anybody else ever did, Hartley. There's nothin' now, except Hank Ludden's word for it. But I don't think Hank would lie about it. Joe was his son-in-law."

"And there were two other men, Corliss. Ludden says there were three in the bunch."

"That's what he says, and he's prob'ly right. Who they are and where they went is a question. There are a lot of riders in the Twisted River range, Hartley. There's six outfits between here and Casco. On the other side of the range are several more outfits within a day's ride of here. Pickin' out two men from that bunch would be quite a job."

They rode in at the Five Box ranch and tied their horses at a corral fence. The Five Box ranch-house was a one-story, rambling sort of place, with a wide veranda around the front and one side. Behind the house was a big stable and to the left of this was a series of corrals. The bunk-house was a long, log building, about a hundred feet away from the ranch-house, and was the only log building in the group. It was evidently at one time the ranch-house building as all the rest of the group were of frame construction and paint had been used lavishly. The house was blue and the stable was red.

"Yuh ought to paint the bunk-house white and change the brand to US," suggested Hashknife, as they dismounted.

"Might be a good idea," laughed Corliss. "O'Day hates red and blue, so he used them colors. It gave him an excuse to curse the ranch along with everythin' else."

They followed Corliss up to the ranch-house veranda, where they found O'Day, snuggled down in an easy chair, watching How Long who was trying to plant a rose bush in the front yard.

O'DAY greeted them with a smile although he did not offer to shake hands with them. He looked even smaller, humped down in that big chair. Perhaps it was because he was not wearing a hat, and his thin, colorless hair was sticking up on his head, like some fox-tail grass.

"Sure, I'm havin' the ——'s own time," he told them. "Did ye ever have to do any gardenin' by Chinese proxy? Ah, it's a task. How Long is a fine Chinaman, but he has an Oriental idea of doin' things. Sure, he came near plantin' my rose bush upside down."

Hashknife laughed and sat down on the veranda, bracing his back against a post, while Sleepy sat down on the steps.

"Goin' to have a rose garden, eh?" asked Hashknife.

"Aye," O'Day squinted against the sun, and the heavy lines of his thin face seemed to deepen. "Dutch O'Day and a rose garden. Well, I've looked at thistles long enough, and it's time I was lookin' at the rose."

"That's the right idea," said Hashknife seriously.

O'Day nodded slowly, squinting at the Chinaman who stood out in the yard, shovel in hand, waiting for his orders.

"If ye put yer feet in the hole, ye'd take root, How Long," laughed O'Day. "Put the root of the bush in the hole and fill in the dirt. But before ye do that, go and get some fertilizer."

The Chinaman looked blankly at O'Day, who turned to Corliss.

"Will ye go wid him. By the time I've explained what fertilizer is, the bush will have died."

Corliss laughed and motioned to the Chinaman, who followed him. O'Day watched them go and turned back to Hashknife.

"Smith," he said slowly, "I want to thank ye for sayin' what ye did to me the other day. It made me so —— mad that I got to thinkin'."

"I'm glad yuh thought," said Hashknife. "But our names are not Smith. My name is Hartley and my pardner's name is Stevens. The Smith part of it was only a joke."

O'Day squinted closely at Hashknife.

"Hartley? Now where did I hear—what do they call ye?"

"They usually call me Hashknife."

"Aye! Hashknife Hartley. I've heard the name, and I've also heard of things ye have done, lad, ye and yer pardner. Well, well! No wonder ye wasn't afraid to throw me reputation into me teeth. Smith brothers!"

O'Day laughed softly and shook his head.

Honey Moon came clattering up the side steps and along the veranda, while around the corner came Corliss and the Chinaman, carrying fertilizer for the roses. O'Day called to Corliss, who came up to them.

"I want you two boys to meet Hashknife Hartley and his partner, Stevens," said O'Day chuckling softly. "They're not the Smith brothers."

"I knew that before we left town," laughed Corliss.

"Oh, ye did, did ye?" grunted O'Day. "Well, Moon didn't."

"I shore didn't," laughed Moon. "I dunno what it's all about, but I s'pose it's all right."

"Ye don't? Honey, I'm surprized at ye. Didn't ye ever hear of Hashknife Hartley?"

"Well, I may be ignorant," laughed Moon, "but I don't—"

"Do you?" O'Day spoke to Corliss, who shook his head.

"All I know is that Amos Hardy called 'em by those names. He came in on the mornin' train and got dead drunk."

"Aye, it's about time for him to come through. Mebbe I better let him sober up and tell yuh who Hartley is, because he travels all through the cow country, and he's likely heard a lot more than I have."

"I don't reckon there's anythin' worth tellin'," said Hashknife. "Hardy would prob'ly lie a lot about us."

"I've heard," said O'Day seriously, "that most of the lies they tell about you are the truth."

"Suppose you tell us," suggested Corliss.

"I'm the biggest liar of them all," laughed Hashknife. "We're just a pair of ramblin' punchers, tha'sall. A feller in Calumet called us a pair of tumble-weeds, and that covers us."

"Do they lie about what ye done in the Thunder River country and up north of Wind River and the jobs here and there for the last few years? What about the Mission River gang? Do they lie about that? I could name ye a few names if ye wish."

"Don't do it, O'Day," smiled Hashknife. "I do not know how it has been told to yuh, so I can't tell whether it's true or not. But me and Sleepy never talk about ourselves. He don't think I amount to much, and I know —— well he don't. So there yuh are.

"If we've made reputations for ourselves, it wasn't because we went seekin' 'em. That part of it was the last thing on our mind. It hasn't paid us in money. Sometimes we have a hard job to get money enough to buy a fresh horse."

"Ye mean that ye don't get paid for what ye do?"

"We don't hire out," smiled Hashknife. "There's no agreement between us and the rest of the world."

"That's —— poor business," said Honey Moon.

"We're not in business."

"I wouldn't take a chance on bein' killed unless I was bein' well paid, y'betcha."

"Wouldn't yuh?" smiled Hashknife. "Do yuh ask for a raise in salary every time yuh top a bucker? Do yuh demand more money to chase a cow down the side of a cañon than yuh do for drivin' one along a flat piece of road?"

"That's different."

"The principle is different, but the result is the same. It don't make much difference whether yuh die from a bullet or a broken neck."

"All the same, I'll take a chance on my horse keepin' its feet," said Moon.

"And we take a chance on a rustler or murderer bein' a bad shot or a slow one."

"That idea is all right," smiled Corliss, "but some day you'll meet one that shoots straight and shoots quick."

"Then I'll be a memory," grinned Hashknife.

* * *

THE Chinaman had finished planting the bush. O'Day thanked him kindly, and the big Long How went away, grinning widely.

"I'm goin' to get more roses," said O'Day. "I'll borrow some of me hard workin' punchers and attach 'em to the wood end of some shovels. Then I can set here and look out at roses and smell 'em. That's all there is left in life for me—just to set down and look on."

"Why don't yuh get some artificial legs?" asked Hashknife. "Yore knees are still good."

"Pegs, do ye mean?"

"Not pegs—legs. Yuh might never become a foot racer, but yuh could walk all around. They're made with braces and some springs, and yuh wear shoes on the feet. Mebby yuh'd have to pack a cane, but what if yuh did?"

O'Day smiled grimly.

"I've never seen anythin' like it, but I believe ye, Hartley. Now where could I buy 'em?"

"I don't just know. I'll tell yuh who could get 'em for yuh, and that's Amos Hardy. He goes east after his buyin' trip is over, and he'd sure do it."

"Mebbe not for me." O'Day was thinking of the only time Amos Hardy had been at the Five Box and they had quarreled over the price of hides.

"He'd do it for me," declared Hashknife. "I'll tell him as soon as we get back."

"Thank ye, Hartley. But I'd like to have a talk wid Hardy meself. He knows the cattle business, and I'd like to talk over the situation wid him. Suppose—" O'Day turned to Corliss—"ye bring him out here? You or one of the other boys take the buckboard in to Arapaho and bring him back.

"We quarreled a long time ago, and he's

not been here since. Hardy's firm pays cash for everythin' they buy, and it saves time. He takes mostly everythin' we have for sale, and his prices are as good as anybody offers. Corliss, ye might tell him that I was wrong on the price of hides, and that I'm sorry for the things I called him."

"All right," nodded Corliss. "I'll ask him to come. Mebbe he won't, O'Day. Hardy is kinda touchy, yuh know."

"Not knowin' him very well, I dunno how his feelin's are. But I think he'll come."

Corliss and Moon went off the veranda and headed for the stable. Dayne had just ridden in and was unsaddling.

"What do ye think of the Five Box, Hartley?" asked O'Day.

"Comfortable sort of a place. I like this long porch and the one-story buildings. The cattle business is good now."

"Aye, it's all right when you're all right. I loved the feel of a good horse between me legs, the trail dust in me nostrils, the smell of the chuck wagon. I love the sight of the cattle along the skyline of the ridges, the roundup crews of dirty, sweatin' punchers, the song and the arguments. Aye, and I loved the fights.

"But I disliked the loadin' pens, Hartley, the long strings of cattle cars, the bawlin' cattle, rattlin' their horns agin' the side of the cars—big, helpless hulks, goin' away to die. Ah, I may be a fool, but I disliked it. The money I got for them gave me little enjoyment.

"Since I've been hurt I haven't even seen a cattle train. I've not seen a cow loaded since then. So many are taken at a time, and I only know that there's that many less Five Box cattle in the Twisted River hills."

Hashknife smiled softly. It was the first time he had ever seen that kind of sentiment in a cattleman.

"The day of the big herds is passin'," said O'Day sadly. "In a few years there'll be no big ranges left. Nesters will be rasin' fruit and vegetables where we raised cattle. Barb wire is comin' in, Hartley. This country can be irrigated, and irrigation will break up the ranges."

"That is true," nodded Hashknife. "But it will be quite a while yet. The world must have meat, and it takes the ranges to furnish it in big quantities. I've been curious to know just why yuh invented the Five Box brand."

O'Day laughed and leaned back in his chair.

"I wanted somethin' that no cow thief could alter into some other brand. I'd defy anybody to take a runnin' iron and change it so that it would look like any other registered brand."

"Well, you sure got it," grinned Hashknife. "It's visible enough."

O'Day shifted himself to an easier position and lowered his voice.

"Hartley, what are you workin' on here?"

"Workin' on?" Hashknife looked up at O'Day. "That's hard to say, old-timer."

"I see. Ye're not workin' for Hank Ludden, are ye?"

"I'm workin' for the right side," said Hashknife slowly. "I'm not sure yet just who is in the right."

"I don't think I understand ye," said O'Day.

"That's about all I can tell yuh."

"It's none of me business, of course. I'd like to hire the two of ye. I know I'm goin' to need a prod once in a while because I'm not cured. I'm tryin' to change me disposition, but it's a hard pull. It's easier to be mean than kind after ye've been mean for so —— long."

"Thank yuh for the jobs," said Hashknife. "But we wouldn't be worth much to yuh, O'Day. We'd be leavin' soon. Yuh can't scratch an itchin' foot and look at the same scenery."

Came the rattle of a buckboard, and Corliss drove past the corner of the veranda, stopping his team long enough to ask O'Day if there was anything he wanted in town. The team was a half broken span of sorrels, threatening any moment to throw themselves, under the strong pull of the lines.

They shot away from the ranch, and the buckboard faded out of sight in a cloud of dust.

"Won't ye stay for supper?" asked O'Day, when Hashknife and Sleepy got to their feet.

"Not today, thanks," said Hashknife. "We'll come out again."

"Make it soon, boys. Thank ye for comin', and if there's any help ye want, don't hesitate to ask for it. And thank ye for suggestin' the legs. I'd try anythin'. My ——, after settin' in a chair as long as I have, I'd try wings if somebody would suggest 'em."

A COUPLE of hours sleep was sufficient for Amos Hardy, and he came back to the War Paint saloon, where he met Armadillo Jones. After a drink to renew old acquaintance, Armadillo told him about Hashknife and Sleepy being in Arapaho and that they were handling the troubles of the Hard Luck ranch.

Amos dimly remembered introducing them to Corliss by their right names, and asked Armadillo if they were traveling incognito.

"You better have another drink," said Armadillo. "Mebbe one more drink of War Paint's best will unravel yore words so a white man can *sabe* 'em."

"I just wanted to know if they were usin' different names."

"Oh, yeah, Smith."

"Uh-huh!" grunted Amos. "I reckon I made a *faux pas*."

"A foo paw, eh? We'll pass that one and have the drink. You don't ache any place do yuh, Amos?"

Amos shook his head slowly as he drank his liquor. Then he wiped his lips thoughtfully and said—

"I reckon I'm *de trop* with Hashknife."

Armadillo dropped his glass on the bar, blinked violently and headed for the door.

"Where yuh goin'?" asked Amos.

"I'm goin' to git me a booktionary, and then I'm comin' back and worry you a while."

Amos laughed and invited the bartender to become his bottle partner.

"I want everybody to be happy," said Amos. "You can't run out on me unless yuh shut up the shop. I never get drunk until I get to Arapaho City. It's so darned far away from the rest of the world that nobody knows what I do."

"You buyin' cattle?" Thus the bartender.

"Y'betcha. I need five hundred head. Spot cash."

"Lotta money. Got it with yuh?"

"I suppose yuh want to play single-handed stud, eh? Nope. Money's in the Arapaho bank. Signed check is in my pocket. I draw what I need. That's how we get the pick of the beef.

"These old cow-men are funny. They want money, not checks. My firm carries a balance in every bank where we do business. Oh, not a big balance, of course. But when I start out, I've got a hunch where I'll land the stuff, so they play the game with me and have the money all set. They've sure got confidence in little Amos."

"You just about buy all the stuff around here, don'tcha?"

"Any place I go, I land the business. I'm too fat to be a crook. Honest Amos Hardy. It's took me all my life to win that name, and I wouldn't be crooked for less'n a million. Drink welcome, —— knows you're hearty."

Corliss came in as they were drinking, and Amos whooped with joy.

"It was a great Democrat victory, and I'm about to be inaugurated," he told Corliss. "This time I'll put you to bed."

"That's a job," said Corliss, who was a trifle proud of his ability to carry liquor. They had several drinks, and Corliss delivered the message from O'Day.

"Go out to see that old reptile?" wailed Amos. "That old jug of profanity? Me? Sa-a-ay, feller! Huh! Have another and you'll see things different."

Corliss did not urge him. He knew what happened to Amos the one time he had been out there and he did not blame him for not wanting to go back again. But the more liquor Amos drank the more indignant he became.

"Can yuh beat that?" he wailed. "Asks me to come out there to see him. Don't he think I've got any feelin's? What does he think I am? I'm s'prized at yuh, Corliss, for askin' me."

Hashknife and Sleepy rode into Arapaho City and entered the War Paint during one of Amos' discourses. Amos whooped with joy and insisted on dragging them to the bar and telling all about Dutch O'Day wanting to see him. Hashknife made no comment, but let Amos wail as loud as he wanted to.

The sheriff drifted in and joined the crowd of which Amos insisted on being toastmaster.

"I'm a nightingale," he told them. "I'm a whippoorwill and a nightingale, mixed with a strain of canary and medder lark. My voice sounds to me like the tinklin' of bells."

"Cow bells," said Sleepy. "And as a birdologist, yo're all off the grade. Yore pedigree right now is one hundred per cent. crow with a touch of buzzard. You've been eatin' birdseed when yuh should have been lookin' for somethin' that had been dead a week."

Sleepy was willing to admit that Amos

Hardy was a good cattle buyer, but he hated to hear even a drunken man brag about himself. But Amos did not care. Sleepy's sarcastic remark went in one ear and out the other.

"I know what I'm goin' to do," declared Amos. "I'm goin' out to see Dutch O'Day."

"Yo're crazy," said the sheriff. "You let O'Day alone."

"Thasso?" Amos flared drunkenly. "Crazy, eh? Like —— I am! I'm just drunk enough to talk to that mummy-faced old chuckwalla. Las' time he told me a few things—thish time I'm gonna tell him a few. C'mon, Corliss."

"You better stay here," advised the sheriff. And advice was something that Amos would not take—not in his condition.

"Don't tell me what to do!" snorted Amos. "I'm free, white and twenty-one. I've spent a lot of money with the darned old caterpillar, and I'm goin' to tell him all about his ancestors.

"I've got a list of every shipment I ever bought from him, every darned cow! And I'm goin' to show him how much money I've spent with him. By golly, he can't curse me and keep m' trade. C'mon, foreman of the Five Box."

CORLISS shook his head at the sheriff, but followed Amos outside and over to the buckboard, where Amos insisted on driving. But Corliss shoved him to the other side of the seat and took the reins himself.

As he turned the half broke team away from the hitch-rack, Amos leaned forward, whipped off his hat and struck one of the horses across the rump which caused the team to whirl wildly and almost upset the buckboard.

"A nice feller when he's sober, but a —— fool when he's drunk," declared the sheriff as he and Hashknife started for the office, followed by Sleepy.

"He'll sober up before he gets back," said Hashknife.

"He prob'ly will. Did yuh go out to see O'Day?"

"Yeah. Found him havin' roses planted in the front yard."

"My ——! Roses? Must have gone crazy. Say, I told McLeod about that note yuh found. He started to deny it, but shut up like a clam. Old Armadillo came down here a while ago. I was out, so he took it upon himself to go back and talk to McLeod. I suppose Armadillo thought it was all right. After he went away I told McLeod about that note."

"Started to deny it?" queried Hashknife.

"Yeah. Then he shut up about it. Said he'd like to see the tall one of the Smith brothers."

"Oh, he did, eh?" Hashknife surmised that Armadillo had told McLeod who the Smith brothers were, but he did not tell the sheriff.

"Mind if I talk with him alone?" asked Hashknife.

"No-o-o, I reckon not. Go ahead. If he tells yuh anythin', I know you'll tell me."

"You think so, do yuh?" said Hashknife to himself, but to the sheriff he merely nodded.

Sleepy and the sheriff sat down in the office, while Hashknife went back to McLeod's cell. McLeod had heard them come in, and was at the bars.

"You wanted to see me?" asked Hashknife.

"Yes. Armadillo Jones told me who you were, and that you were tryin' to find out who was stealin' from the Hard Luck ranch."

"Quite an order, don'tcha think, McLeod?"

"It has never been done. A while ago the sheriff accused me of bein' one of the thieves. Where did ye find that note?"

"In yore coat, hangin' on the wall of yore cabin."

McLeod's amazement was genuine. He scratched his red hair violently and squinted at Hashknife. He felt that Hashknife was telling the truth, although he, McLeod, knew nothing about the note.

"That beats the ——!"

"It does," agreed Hashknife, grinning. "But unless it can be explained, yo're up against it awful hard, McLeod."

McLeod shook his head.

"But I can't explain it. Neither can I explain how ye happened to find me gun in Crow Rock Cañon. I've never been there, I tell ye. I'll admit in court that I shot at a man, but I'll insist that he got what was comin' to him, but I'll admit no rustlin'."

"You were a good friend to Joe Lane?"

"Yes. I liked the lad. He often came out to see me."

"He was killed for stealin' cattle."

"That's tr-r-rue. But does that make

me one? Man, there's a plot to make things awful har-r-rd for Scotty McLeod."

He shook his head sadly, a dismal expression in his blue eyes.

"It's bad enough to be hung for killin' a man, but I've no likin' to be branded a thief in the bargain. The prosecutin' attorney was in to see me this mornin', and he asked me who my attorney might be. I've no attorney. What good would one be to me? All the ar-r-rguments in the world would only bring it back to the fact that I defended myself and killed a man."

Hashknife laughed softly as he rolled a smoke.

"It sure looks bad for yuh, McLeod. I told Ludden I'd try and find out who was stealin' HL cattle. That's a big job. I've got a theory, tha'sall. I don't believe you was with Joe Lane. You say you was in town, and must have left here shortly before Lane was killed. I'm goin' to believe that, whether any one else believes it or not."

"Are you goin' to try and prove that I'm not a thief?"

"I'm goin' to try it, McLeod. Everythin' is against me, but I'll do what I can. Don't say anythin' about it. Keep still about that note and the gun. *Sabe?*"

Hashknife went back to the sheriff and Sleepy, but told the sheriff that McLeod had nothing new to tell. While they were talking a man came in whom Hashknife recognized as being the prosecuting attorney.

They went away, leaving him with the sheriff, and strolled up to the general store, where they made a few purchases and were going back to their room, when the sheriff hailed them.

"This is a —— of a note!" he snorted. "The prosecutor says that there's too much talk about the killin' of Joe Lane. He says that it ain't never been proved that Joe Lane was stealin' cows when Ludden killed him, so now he demands that I arrest Ludden."

Hashknife whistled softly.

"Gee, that's too bad. But I can see his viewpoint, Sheriff. We all took Ludden's word for it."

"I s'pose that's true, Hartley, but my ——, I hate this job of mine! Oh, well, I suppose if I arrest enough of 'em, I'll get the guilty ones after while. This —— prosecutor will bring a charge of murder against old Hank, as sure as ——. He ain't got no heart, liver or lights when it comes to makin' a case against somebody."

"They're all alike," said Hashknife sadly. "I like to settle all my cases out of court."

"Yeah, I hear yuh do," meaningly. The sheriff sighed deeply. "Well, I s'pose that's the best way. But I've got my orders, and I've got to do it. Old Armadillo will prob'ly hit me with the grind-stone or a two-faced ax before I can get Hank off the ranch. By ——, it sure is Hard Luck ranch."

MUCH against his will the sheriff rode away to arrest Hank Ludden. Sleepy and Hashknife went to their room and sprawled on the bed, where Hashknife smoked innumerable cigarets and ignored all of Sleepy's questions.

"Thinkin', eh?" Thus Sleepy indignantly. "Well, there's sure a-plenty to think about. By golly, I could almost set down and do some thinkin' myself—almost. Rotten deal for Ludden. He never killed Joe Lane on purpose. This'll set a fine example for the rest of the rustlers.

"Pretty soon a sheriff will have to take out a license as an executioner in order to compete with crime. Hank Ludden up and shoots a cow-thief instead of kissin' him, and they throw Ludden in jail. By golly, I'm sure goin' to set on my gun-hand in this country."

"How in —— can yuh expect a feller to think?" demanded Hashknife indignantly. "You sure do flow vocally, pardner. Ho, hum-m!"

Hashknife sat up on the bed and dusted the tobacco from the folds of his shirt.

"Conscious again, eh?" grunted Sleepy. "I suppose you've got it all figured out now, and all we've got to do is to go out and put the handcuffs on the criminals. My golly, yuh sure do go in a trance, tall feller."

"I ain't got it all clear yet," grinned Hashknife.

"Have yuh got any of it clear?"

"Clear enough for me, but not enough for a jury. They need a lot of facts, while all I need is a hunch. It's too stuffy up here, so I'll play yuh a game of pool. I need somethin' to take my mind off the troubles of the world."

They left their room and went across the street to the War Paint. All was serene in Arapaho City, drowsing beneath a warm sun. Only two or three men loafed in the saloon, and the bartender sprawled across the bar, reading a love-story. Hashknife and Sleepy went to the rear of the room and began playing pool. It was one form of relaxation that appealed to Hashknife, who was able to banish all else from his mind in the serious business of trying to figure out bank and combination shots. Neither of them was a good player.

They were in the midst of their second string of fifty markers when Dayne of the Five Box came clattering in, the rowels of his big spurs jangling over the rough floor.

"Does anybody know where the doctor is?" he asked loudly.

Hashknife and Sleepy stopped playing, while the rest of the men in the saloon denied all knowledge of the doctor's whereabouts.

"Somebody sick?" asked the bartender, marking the place in his paper-backed novel.

"Aw, that —— fool cattle buyer got himself killed, I think. I've got to get the doctor to pass judgment though."

"Amos Hardy killed?" The bartender was shocked.

"I think so," Dayne leaned on the bar, bracing himself with his crooked elbow.

He rubbed his broken nose and squinted at Hashknife and Sleepy, who came up to the bar, still carrying their cues.

"How did it happen?" asked Hashknife.

"'Bout a mile this side of the ranch." Dayne spat dryly. "Hardy was drunk. He wanted to drive, but Corliss wouldn't let him. They had quite a quarrel, so Corliss says, and when they was goin' around a turn in Sweetwater canon, Hardy grabbed the whip and slashed the team with it.

"That team wasn't more 'n half broke, yuh know. Corliss tried to hold 'em, but he broke a line, the right one, and throwed all the pull on the left. Corliss jumped, and all he got was a skinned leg. It's about forty feet straight down to the bottom, and all rocks. One horse was killed and we had to shoot the other. O'Day told me to get the doctor out there as soon as I could, but I can't find him. Don't reckon it'll do Hardy any good, 'cause he's too dead to skin."

One of the men reported that he had seen the doctor go in to the general store across the street, and Dayne left his interested audience to hurry to the store. Hashknife and Sleepy went back to their unfinished game, but did not complete it.

They had known Amos Hardy for a long time, and his death had taken away their desire to play pool. Dayne found the doctor at the store and they went away together.

It was about two hours later that the sheriff came back to town, bringing Hank Ludden, and accompanied by Armadillo Jones, who was mad enough to fight the world. Ludden was lodged in a cell across the hall from McLeod, and the sheriff and Armadillo were back in the office when Hashknife and Sleepy came and told them what had happened to Amos Hardy.

The sheriff threw up both hands.

"What next?" he wailed. "By grab, I'm sick of all this trouble!"

"You and me both!" snorted Armadillo. "Lemme git my hands on that —— prosecutin' attorney. I voted for that pole-cat. Actually did. Thought he had brains. Arrestin' old Hank! My ——, the old man is grievin' his heart out over killin' Joe Lane, and now a —— fool of a lawyer has him arrested."

"Well, I can't help it!" snapped the sheriff. "It wasn't my idea, Armadillo."

"Nobody blamin' yuh, is there? I voted for you, too."

"Yeah, and if yuh think I'm thankin' yuh for that vote, you've got another think comin'," retorted the sheriff. "If I ever run for this —— office, I hope I don't get a vote."

"Yuh prob'ly won't," said Armadillo, and added dryly, "not if I have anythin' to say about it."

Hashknife and Sleepy grinned at the repartee. It was like a little terrier snapping at the heels of a great dane. They were the best of friends, but both of them were so exasperated that they used each other as an outlet.

"I'm goin' up to see Mary Lane," declared Armadillo. "I'm goin' to gird up my loins and tell her who's which."

"It won't do yuh no good to wish more trouble on her," said the sheriff. "She'll find out anyway."

"Of course she will. But I want her to know jist how her daddy feels about the shootin'. It'd make a —— of a lot of difference to Hank if Mary would come down and see him. That —— old fool would set right there and let yuh hang him, 'cause he thinks there ain't nothin' left in the world."

“Well, she won’t never come,” declared the sheriff.

Armadillo squinted closely at the sheriff. “You won’t do anythin’ to stop her if she wants to come, will yuh?”

“Of course not.”

“All right.” Armadillo spat violently, hitched up his belt and went bow-legging his way out of the office.

It was not a job to Armadillo’s liking, but he knew it must be done. He had really wanted an excuse to talk with Mary. Somehow he could not believe that Mary would refuse to see her father. At least, he thought, she would not refuse to see him.

HE TURNED the corner at the old cottonwood and went out to Lane’s house, a little, one-story, unpainted cottage. There was little style to the Arapaho residential architecture. The front yard was enclosed with a picket-fence, many pickets being missing, and the gate sagged from one hinge.

It creaked loudly, when Arapaho opened it, and he looked apprehensively toward the house. Nothing happened. There were a few rose bushes in the front yard, and Armadillo stopped to examine them for no reason except that it delayed him.

He heard the front door open, but did not look up. Another bush drew his immediate attention. Finally he lifted his head and looked at Mary Lane, standing just outside the door. For several moments they looked at each other. They might have been total strangers, as far as recognition was concerned.

Armadillo looked back toward town, removing his hat and rubbing the side of his head with the heel of the same hand. He turned back and looked at Mary.

“What do you want?” she asked softly.

“I had to come, Mary,” he said simply. “They said yuh wouldn’t have anythin’ to do with us any more, but I—” He smiled slowly— “Yuh know I never was any hand to believe what I heard.”

“I never said such a thing, Armadillo. But after what happened, you—”

“Oh, I *sabe* all that. It sure was an awful blow. It almost killed yuh, Mary. I know it did. It almost killed Hank Ludden, too.”

Mary’s lips shut tightly and she looked away.

“It made him a hundred years old, Mary. He’d give his life to bring Joe Lane back. We was a pair of —— old fools, Mary. We was jealous of Joe Lane, I reckon. We didn’t realize that both of yuh was young.”

“But it’s too late now,” she said painfully. “I’m sorry about Dad. I might have been wrong, too.”

“Yeah, it sure looks like it was too late, Mary. Yore dad was arrested today for the killin’ of Joe.”

“What?” Mary came closer to Armadillo, searching his face, wondering if she had misunderstood.

“Yeah, it’s true, Mary,” he said slowly. “He’s in jail. The prosecutin’ attorney made the sheriff do it. He said that there was no proof that yore dad had shot Joe while Joe was in the act of stealin’ cattle. They’ll give Hank a hearin’ tomorrow, ’cause court opens the next day.”

“But they don’t think that Dad did it—” Mary hesitated, shaking her head, her eyes wide. “Armadillo do they think that Dad lied?”

“That’s what they think, Mary. But they’re crazy.”

“Then you think Joe was a thief?”

“Aw-w-w, ——!” Armadillo floundered badly. “I don’t know what I think, Mary. I’ve talked it over with yore dad until I dunno whether I’m afoot or on horseback. I wanted to be the one to tell yuh. Yore dad is settin’ down there in the jail, lookin’ at the wall, wonderin’ what’ll come next. I told him I was goin’ to see yuh, and he said it wouldn’t help any, but for me to tell yuh he was sorry.”

“Sorry, Armadillo?”

“Well, that’s about all he could tell me. Hank never was a good hand at expressin’ himself except with profanity. Bein’ sorry means a lot for him to admit, Mary.”

“But what can I do?” asked Mary helplessly.

“Go down and talk with him, girl. He’s yore dad. Stick to him. He didn’t hurt yuh on purpose, honest he didn’t.”

“I don’t believe he did,” she said slowly. “It hurt me so much that I haven’t been able to think.”

“I’ll betcha that’s right, Mary. It sure was tough. I jist wondered how yuh was gettin’ along for money, yuh know.”

“Oh, that part of it is all right, Armadillo. The county is going to pay me—”

She hesitated. The sheriff had told her not to talk about it.

"Yeah, I heard they was," said Armadillo with great satisfaction.

He wondered how the sheriff had fixed it up. Mary looked at him, wondering how much he knew. If he had heard of the generosity of the county, it was no longer a secret.

"Yes," she said, "it is wonderful. It seems that they don't believe Joe was dishonest, because they are going to pay me three times what Joe's salary would have been. Just think of it! Three hundred and thirty dollars a month!"

Armadillo gulped heavily, blinking his eyes. Three hundred and thirty a month!

"But please don't mention it to any one, Armadillo. The sheriff said the county didn't want it generally known."

"I sh'd think not," muttered Armadillo blankly.

Mary got her hat and accompanied Armadillo down to the jail, where they found Hashknife in charge, the sheriff having gone to the Five Box ranch.

Hashknife shook hands with Mary, although he had never been introduced, and offered them chairs.

"I'm runnin' this place right now," smiled Hashknife as he closed the front door and locked it.

He took a key from the sheriff's desk and walked to the door which connected the office with the jail.

"I'll let my star prisoner come out here to yuh," he told them. "The key will be in the lock, and when yuh get through talkin' yuh can lock him in again. This may not be accordin' to Hoyle, but there's a lot of things done around here that ain't been accordin' to Hoyle."

He walked back to Ludden's cell, swung the door open and told Ludden he was wanted in the office. Wonderingly the old man headed through the doorway, while Hashknife closed the connecting door and went quietly out the rear.

Hashknife had no fear of Hank Ludden escaping, and he did not want the meeting of father and daughter to occur in the presence of McLeod. Not that it would make any difference, except that Hashknife had an idea that it might better be held in private.

He went to the War Paint where he joined Sleepy. Several more cattlemen had ridden in and were discussing Hank Ludden's arrest and the death of Amos Hardy, who was well known. None of them was in sympathy with the law regarding the arrest of Ludden.

They were willing to take it for granted that Hank had shot Joe Lane for rustling cattle, and they indignantly wanted to know what they were to do in case they caught a rustler red-handed.

"Git up a petition orderin' him to leave the country," decided a bandy-legged cowboy seriously. "Or yuh might speak severely to him."

"And git arrested for slander," grunted another, which caused a general laugh.

It was a short time later that the sheriff and doctor came back with the body of Amos Hardy, which was left at the doctor's office. Hashknife joined the sheriff, and they were almost to the office when Mary and Armadillo came out.

"I left 'em alone to talk with Hank," explained Hashknife.

"Tha'sall right," said the sheriff. Mary greeted him with a smile and a handshake.

"I hope yuh ain't sore at me, Mary," he said.

She shook her head quickly.

"Not a bit. It isn't anything you could help."

"I'm sure glad yuh feel thataway. Come again."

"I surely will."

They went on, and the sheriff looked quizzically at Hashknife, who shrugged his shoulders.

"Armadillo brought her," he said. "I'm glad for Ludden's sake."

"So am I."

* * *

THEY went in the office and sat down. The sheriff stretched wearily, his big hands dropping loosely in his lap, while his sad eyes contemplated the opposite wall.

"Hardy was dead, eh?" queried Hashknife.

"Yeah. Musta landed down in that cañon on his head. The team and buckboard are still there. Too much liquor."

The sheriff took a bundle of papers from his pocket and placed them on his desk. From another he took a sum of money, a pocket-knife, a watch.

"Amos Hardy's personal effects," he said sadly.

"Mind if I look at 'em?" asked Hashknife.

"Certainly not. Go ahead."

Hashknife examined all the papers, which consisted of some personal letters, business letters, telegrams, business cards. He looked them all over carefully and put them back.

"We've got to send word to his firm," said the sheriff. "Nobody around here knows where Hardy's home is."

"I never heard," said Hashknife thoughtfully. "When do yuh give Hank Ludden a hearin'?"

"Tomorrow mornin'. Court opens the next day, and we've got to find out if Hank has got to stand trial. There ain't a lot of cases on the calendar, and we can't hold Hank Ludden for another three months."

"I don't see how they can hold him," mused Hashknife. "He says Joe Lane was stealin' cattle. How can the law prove that Joe wasn't. It looks to me like a foolish case."

"I reckon so, Hartley. But there's so much talk about it that the prosecutor has got to do somethin'. Old Hank won't hire a lawyer."

"Prob'ly don't realize what it means. I'm naturally interested, because I told him I'd try and change the luck of the HL ranch."

"You've got a job, Hartley."

Hashknife smiled softly and rubbed his nose. "I did have," he said slowly. "See yuh later."

He left the office and the sheriff squinted after him.

"He did have," muttered the sheriff. "Did have, eh? Now what did he mean by that, I wonder?"

Hashknife's words were food for thought, and the sheriff of Arapaho tried to digest them. What did Hashknife know that the rest of them did not know, he wondered? Was he bluffing or did he really know something?

"I don't think he's bluffing," decided the sheriff. "That long, lean, question-eyed whippoorwill has seen somethin'. He's got a reputation that he didn't get from settin' still."

Hashknife went up the street and was standing in the doorway of the general store, when Honey Moon and Dayne rode in and tied their horses at the War Paint hitch-rack. They waved at Hashknife as they went to the saloon—Honey Moon waddling along like a duck while Dayne went stiffly, his crippled arm giving him a peculiar appearance.

Some more cowboys came up the other side of the street and went in the saloon. Hashknife puffed on a cigaret, his eyes half closed, as he tried to map out his next move. The cigaret burned his lip, and he spat it out.

Across the street he went and into the War Paint. Sleepy was at the bar with the rest of the cowboys, and the conversation was still about the arrest of Hank Ludden. The Five Box boys were anxious to hear all about it, and the bartender, acting in the capacity of a town crier, was giving them plenty of information.

"Aw, that's a rotten deal," declared Honey Moon. "They can't never cinch the old man."

"The —— they can't!" Thus the bartender. "The law can cinch anybody. They could cinch me or they could cinch you. You ain't got a chance agin' a smart lawyer."

"Yeah, and they'll get you, too," said Sleepy seriously. "Don't yuh know it's a crime to serve the kind of liquor you do? I've heard that you bought that barrel of whisky seven years ago, used out of it steady ever since, and you've still got two-thirds of it left."

Sleepy hadn't heard any such thing, but he delighted in an argument. Before the spluttering bartender could frame a fitting defense, Hashknife came in beside Sleepy and offered to buy a drink. The acceptance was unanimous.

"You were talkin' about Hank Ludden," reminded Hashknife. "Didja ever stop to think what a conviction of him would mean to things out in the ranges?"

"Sure thing," nodded Honey Moon. "It'll mean that a man will be scared to shoot at a rustler, unless he has a couple of lawyers along with him and permit from the court."

"That's just what it'll mean, Moon. Now here's what we've got to do, boys. The case is awful weak on both sides, but we can't take any chances. Every one of you fellers bring in all the punchers yuh can. By golly, we can sure make it so uncomfortable for the law that they won't dare hold him. *Sabe?*"

"We'll sure do that," said Honey. "There's too danged much law around here, anyway."

They drank to success. Hashknife's scheme appealed to all of them, and Hashknife drew Moon aside.

"Have O'Day come in, too, will yuh? He can protest just as hard as the rest of us, and the fact that he took the trouble to come down here will kinda add power to us."

"I'll tell him," grinned Moon. "Yuh never can figure out what Dutch O'Day will do. He thinks yo're a little tin god, Hartley."

"I am," said Hashknife seriously.

"Oh, yeah," Moon's fat face expressed only a blank stare.

He didn't know whether Hashknife was serious or not.

"I'm pretty smart," said Hashknife. "Prob'ly a lot smarter than most folks, but I can't help it. I was born thataway."

"Uh-huh," Moon nodded foolishly. "Well, I'll tell the boys."

"Thank yuh," Hashknife walked to the rear of the room and began practising on the pool table, while Moon went back to the bar, wondering what kind of an egotistical fool Hashknife really was.

All the wonderful stories he had heard of Hashknife's ability were immediately discounted. He nudged Sleepy and attracted his attention.

"What kind of a feller is yore pardner?" he asked.

"Hashknife?" Sleepy squinted sideways at Moon. "I'll tell yuh the truth, Honey—he's about half-loco."

"Honest?"

"Well," Sleepy shrugged his shoulders, "a feller wouldn't say that about his pardner if it wasn't true, would he?"

"Um-m-m-m," Moon glanced at Hashknife thoughtfully. "No, I don't reckon yuh would. But I've heard so much about him."

"Oh, yeah," Sleepy turned and looked at Hashknife before replying. "That was quite a while ago, Honey. He used to be good. Yeah, he sure used to be a dinger. But now?" Sleepy shook his head sadly.

"Told me he was a tin god," whispered Moon.

Sleepy choked. In fact he strangled, and there were tears on his cheeks before he could swallow again.

"He thinks he is," said Sleepy hoarsely. "He's all right if yuh leave him alone."

"Sure."

Moon and Dayne left the saloon. Sleepy went back to Hashknife and they racked up the balls for a game.

"What was Honey Moon whisperin' to you about?" asked Hashknife.

Sleepy leaned on the table and laughed so hard he missed the cue ball.

"He thinks yo're crazy, Hashknife. Did you tell him you was a tin god?"

"I admitted that I was," grinned Hashknife.

The grin vanished as he slowly chalked his cue, and his eyes looked somberly toward the front of the room.

"I might be, at that, Sleepy. The Tin God of Twisted River, if I guess right."

Sleepy straightened up and looked keenly at Hashknife.

"Is it almost time to say 'when,' cowboy?" he asked softly.

"Almost," Hashknife nodded thoughtfully. "I'm all set, pardner. Mebbe I'm wrong, but I can almost read what's written after certain names in the Big Book. It ain't plain yet, but plain enough."

"I *sabe*," said Sleepy seriously.

He knew that Hashknife's work had not been in vain, although Hashknife had given him no inkling of what he had found out. It was not like Hashknife to tell any one what he was doing, and Sleepy had learned to follow blindly to the end.

"Do yuh know the name of the man who sent yuh the letter?" asked Sleepy.

Hashknife shook his head.

"Don't need it now."

They stood for several moments, looking at the layout of colored balls and making no effort to continue play. Then Hashknife missed an easy side-pocket shot and dropped the cue ball in a corner pocket. Sleepy studied the layout for several moments, ignoring the fact that the cue ball was not in sight. All of which showed that their minds were not on the game. Then, as if by mutual consent, they put their cues in the rack and walked outside, where they sat down in the shade with their backs against the wall.

THAT the cattlemen of Twisted River wished to keep their rights, so far as killing off rustlers was concerned, was attested by the fact that the ranges were well represented in Arapaho City the following morning.

The arrest of Hank Ludden was considered a direct slap in their faces, and a conviction would establish a dangerous precedent. So they had come to attend the hearing of Ludden and to protest vigorously.

Macey, the prosecuting attorney, had got wind of Hashknife's scheme, met him at the sheriff's office and pointed out that he, Hashknife, was trying to interfere with the law.

"Nothin' of the kind," laughed Hashknife.

"With the room filled with hostile cowboys, do you think a justice of the peace would dare decide against Ludden?"

"Well, you've got no case against him."

"Very well. Then let the case decide itself. If we have no case against him, why bring all these cowboys?"

"Don'tcha like to act in front of a big crowd?" grinned Hashknife. Then seriously, "Macey, I came here to find the answer to a mystery."

"You did, eh?" The lawyer smiled indulgently. "I don't believe in mysteries."

"No, I s'pose not. Lotsa folks don't believe in Santa Claus, but they always get up early Christmas mornin' and take a good look around to see what has been left for 'em."

The lawyer laughed. He had an exalted idea of his own importance, but he was just a trifle curious about the mystery.

"Just what mystery were you trying to solve?"

"You've heard of Hard Luck ranch?"

"Yes. But as far as any mystery is concerned, no."

"Perhaps it ain't no mystery to you when cattle disappear month after month, and nobody knows where they went."

The lawyer smiled.

"I've heard something of it. Perhaps there is a mystery in that. The other happenings were merely coincidences."

"Certainly. I'm not tryin' to find out how it is that men get killed accidently, and all that. That's none of our business. But losin' cattle, that's different."

"I see. But what has that to do with the trial of Henry Ludden?"

"He killed a rustler, didn't he?"

"It seems to me," said the lawyer solemnly, "that we are not getting anywhere with our argument. I tried to point out to you the folly of trying to stampede my court with a lot of indignant cowboys, and you get me into an argument over some mystery."

"Which shows that you ain't so awful narrow," laughed Hashknife. Then seriously. "Macey, here's the way yore case stands right now. Hank Ludden ain't got any defense. He can't prove that Joe Lane was at that old U6 corral. He can't prove that any one was there, nor that a single head of cattle was in the corral. If you say that he met Joe Lane alone on the hills and killed him, he can't prove that you're wrong.

"Nor can you prove that yo're right. It's yore imagination against his word, and —— only knows what a jury might do. Do you want a conviction, whether the old man is guilty or not, or do you want justice done?"

The lawyer studied Hashknife for several moments.

"If you can prove it to my satisfaction—justice, of course."

"Good. Now quit wailin' about the cowboys stampedin' yore courtroom. Forget the dignity of the court, and let me run part of the show to suit myself."

"But you can't—"

Macey started to protest, but the sheriff interrupted him.

"Let Hartley alone, Macey. I dunno his proposition, but I'm behind his play right now."

"Well," dubiously. "A court of law has a certain dignity to uphold, whether it is in a big city or on a cattle range."

"It won't lose any dignity," Hashknife smiled softly. "See yuh later."

Hashknife crossed to the War Paint, where a goodly crowd were already filled with good cheer. Honey Moon drew Hashknife aside and informed him that O'Day would be there soon.

Corliss, limping a little from his accident, shook hands with Hashknife.

"You got off lucky," said Hashknife.

Corliss nodded quickly.

"I jumped just in time. How soon does that hearing start?"

"Pretty soon, I reckon. Get yore boys down close to the front where we can sort of look things over close, will yuh?"

"Sure thing."

Hashknife motioned to the bartender, who came down to the end of the bar.

"Can I borrow that blackboard back by the pool table?" asked Hashknife.

The bartender squinted at the rear wall, where a blackboard, about three feet square, was suspended with a wire from a nail. It was used for keeping pool scores.

"Borrow it? Sure yuh can. But you'll bring it back, won't yuh?"

"Sure," Hashknife lifted the wire off the nail, picked up a stick of chalk, and walked out through the back door, carrying the blackboard, while the bartender squinted after him, wonderingly.

"What in —— is he goin' to do with the blackboard?" asked Dayne, who had seen Hashknife depart.

"I could answer something else a lot easier than that," grunted the bartender, and went back to his clamoring patrons.

Hashknife circled the saloon, crossed the street and went into the building that was used as a courtroom. The door was open, but no one was in the room. There were a few benches, but most of the seats were chairs. A wide aisle down the center was the only mode of inlet and exit.

The room was about fifty feet long and thirty feet wide, with a space of about fifteen feet deep railed off for the judge, jury and those immediately concerned in the case. The judge's desk was an old roll-top affair on a level with the rest of the room.

* * *

HASHKNIFE walked back to the desk and looked at the back wall. There were plenty of protruding nails on which to hang his blackboard. He selected one to the left of the desk which would allow the board to hang about five feet above the floor.

The blackboard was the same on both sides, and was scarred from much usage. Hashknife carefully drew some cabalistic marks on it, before hanging it, with the marks turned to the wall. Then he sat down on a front seat, rolled a cigaret and waited for the time to come.

He had only been seated a few minutes when Sleepy came in. He sauntered down to Hashknife, squinting at the blackboard, and sat down.

"Goin' to do some examples for the class?" asked Sleepy.

Hashknife nodded.

"Dutch O'Day just drove in," offered Sleepy. A noise at the door caused them to turn. The big Chinaman, Long How, was coming in, carrying O'Day.

"C'mon down here," called Hashknife, and the Chinaman came grinning down the aisle, depositing O'Day on a front seat.

"Thank ye, How Long," said O'Day, adjusting himself carefully. "Ye may run down to the Pekin Café and enjoy yer old friend. I'll send for ye when this is over."

Long How smiled and went shuffling out.

"Ye heard about Hardy, of course," said O'Day. "The poor ——. Too much liquor. Corliss tells me that Hardy was comin' out to pay me back for what I said to him," O'Day sighed. "Ah, it's true that when ye try to cook up a great heat against a man, ye may get scorched yerself. I know it, Hartley.

"They tell me that things may go against Hank Ludden. We've not spoken for two years, but I'd like to tell him that I'm for him."

"He'd appreciate it, O'Day. His daughter was down to see him yesterday, and I hope things are right between them."

"I hope so. She's a nice girl. I've seen her grow up, Hartley, but the other day was the first time I realized it."

Men were beginning to drift in, and among them was Armadillo Jones, who came down to the front, selected his chair and sat down defiantly. Hashknife noticed that Armadillo shifted his holster so that his gun rested across his lap. He glared at O'Day, but grinned at Hashknife and Sleepy.

The prosecuting attorney came in, carrying a book and some papers. He squinted at the blackboard, but said nothing. Armadillo's eyes followed every movement of the lawyer, and the little man's eyes were filled with hate.

The seats were filling rapidly, and the lawyer glanced at the crowd apprehensively. Finally he came to Hashknife, speaking to him in whispers:

"I don't like the looks of this. If you have any influence over these men, I hope you will speak to them before the hearing begins."

Hashknife nodded.

"I'll see that yore case ain't hurt."

"Thank you."

The three men from the Five Box came down the aisle, looking over the empty seats. There were twelve jury chairs at the left side, facing the judge's desk, and the three cowboys clattered over to take possession of three seats.

"My ——, I'd hate to be on trial with a jury like that!" yelled a cowboy back in the crowd. It caused a general laugh, much to the embarrassment of the three cowboys, who did not realize that they were making themselves conspicuous. Honey Moon got up and opened the window near them. Some one clapped his hands in applause, and Honey slipped back to his seat, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

Then came the sheriff, Hank Ludden and Mary Lane. The roar of conversation ceased abruptly, and the last half of their walk to the table beside the judge's desk was made in silence. They sat down, and Armadillo moved over to join them.

Ludden looked old and tired, but there was a smile in his eyes, as he leaned over and listened to what Mary was saying. His long, gray hair was unkempt, and his big hands were locked together on the table, as he peered at the crowd beneath his heavy brows.

The justice who was to hear the case came bustling in. When not acting in his official capacity, he handled part of the affairs of the Arapaho-Casco stage line. He was too fat to be dignified and too unversed in court procedure to even be calm.

He wiped his brow, nodded to the prosecutor and sat down heavily. From back in the room a man called—

"Remember, Hank, we're with yuh."

Hank Ludden smiled. The prosecuting attorney shot a quick glance at Hashknife, who got to his feet, walked to the blackboard, where he printed in large letters—

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS BOARD IS THE ANSWER TO THE TWISTED RIVER MYSTERY.

Then he put the chalk in his pocket and stepped aside. Every eye in the room was on the board, and from different parts of the room came droning voices as some read it aloud. The judge and prosecutor stared at the board and at Hashknife.

"Well, turn it over!" yelled an impatient cowboy, and the conversation roared again, as men asked each other what was meant.

"What's the mystery?" asked Corliss. "Let us in on it."

Hashknife leaned back against the wall and looked at the prosecutor.

"Mind if I talk a few minutes?" he asked.

"It looks as though you might have to talk," said the prosecutor.

Hashknife grinned at the crowd.

"This little social gatherin' was for the purpose of seein' whether the law could try Hank Ludden for the murder of Joe Lane," began Hashknife easily. "The law didn't have no case, and Hank didn't have no defense.

"Now, I've got to go back a few months to a time when a man wrote me a letter from Arapaho City, warnin' me not to come and take charge of the HL ranch. I didn't *sabe* it. Amos Hardy had told Hank Ludden to try and get me to come, and gave Hank my address at Calumet.

"Hank's letter had a return address on it, so he got his letter back. The other letter had none, and that's why I got warned off a job I never took."

Hashknife laughed softly and looked around. Every man was leaning forward, listening intently.

"So," continued Hashknife, "we came here to see why we wasn't wanted, and we ran into a killin'. We seen a man fall in the road, and a few minutes later, Hank Ludden tried to kill the both of us. He thought we were the two men who had been with the one he had shot.

"But we got away, circled back to the road, and I think Hank chased us to town, where he got the sheriff and went out to find that he had shot his son-in-law. After we got away from Hank Ludden, another shot was fired, off to the west of us.

"But we got to town. The sun was in our eyes, and the horse and rider appeared so sudden-like and the horse went into the brush so quickly that we didn't see what color it was.

"But," Hashknife paused, scanning the crowd, as though trying to make up his mind what to say next, "I am goin' to prove to you that Hank Ludden never killed Joe Lane!"

IT WAS like dropping a bombshell in the room. For a moment there was silence, then a roar of wonderment, a laugh. Hank Ludden got to his feet, staring at Hashknife.

"Never killed him?" queried the sheriff. "What do yuh mean?"

Hashknife held up his hand as a signal for silence. It was difficult to silence the room, but Hashknife waited.

"I am goin' to prove that Joe Lane was killed by the rustlers. Now keep still! I never got up here to answer questions."

"Next thing, you'll be sayin' that McLeod didn't kill Naylor," snorted one of the audience.

"He didn't!" Hashknife's reply snapped like a whip.

It left the audience goggle-eyed. They stared at him, as if he had gone crazy. Hashknife's eyes flashed to the three Five Box cowboys and found them staring wide-eyed at him.

"Then who killed Naylor?" demanded a man on the second row.

"Hank Ludden!"

"For ——'s sake!" exclaimed a high-pitched voice. "What'll he tell next?"

"What makes yuh think so?"

"How in —— could he?"

"Hank wasn't at McLeod's place!"

"Yo're crazy!"

The questions and arguments came too fast for any of them to be intelligible.

"Shut up!" The sheriff sprang to his feet and roared his order at the crowd. "Set down! Now, keep still!"

Hashknife's lips grinned, but his eyes were as hard as flint as he waited, watching every movement. O'Day was staring up at him, his lips twitching, while Sleepy cautiously eased his gun loose in its scabbard, wondering what was coming next, but ready for anything.

Ludden had not resumed his seat, but was leaning one hand on the table, staring at Hashknife, wondering if it could possibly be true. The sheriff's orders had caused the crowd to quiet enough for Hashknife to proceed.

"Hank Ludden saw three men at the old U6 corral," said Hashknife. "They were misbrandin' cattle. He shot one and the other two got away.

"Joe Lane, on his way to the Five Box, heard the shootin', and started toward it. He ran into the two rustlers, who killed him, probably thinkin' he was workin' with Ludden.

"These rustlers knew that one of their bunch had been shot. They had to get him. For the sheriff to find him would be to incriminate all of them, so they substituted Joe Lane's body for that of their companion. Hank Ludden didn't know it, 'cause he never looked at it until the sheriff was with him.

"These two rustlers took the body of their companion with 'em. They had to alibi him, so they picked a fight with Scotty McLeod, to blame him and—"

Hashknife whirled, turned the blackboard around, disclosing a heavily chalked HL brand, with thin chalk lines added to it, which builded it into a perfect Five Box brand.

The denouement came so suddenly that Moon and Dayne were stricken dumb. But not so with Corliss, whose brains had worked out all these schemes for them. There were but two ways out of the room, the main aisle and the open window, and Corliss knew he could never make the window.

And, knowing that only a miracle could save him, he was on his feet before the blackboard had completely turned, whipping out his gun as he came, fairly screaming an oath at Hashknife, who had drawn so swiftly that it was an even break between them, but Sleepy's six-shooter crashed out before either of them could shoot, and Corliss whirled sidewise, his gun falling to the floor.

Moon and Dayne dashed for the window, but Moon's grasp was inches short.

Both Hashknife and Sleepy were shooting at them, and at that distance there was little chance of a miss. Both Dayne and Moon were making a desperate effort to keep going. Dayne was partly shielded by Moon, who was more intent on escape than fight.

He whirled, falling with his back against the wall, and his one shot skittered along the table-top, filling old Armadillo's eyes with splinters. Dayne's gun clattered to the floor and he threw up his one good arm in a token of surrender, his two shots having gone wild, but he was surrendering to a higher power than the courts of law of Arapaho.

Hashknife vaulted across the body of Corliss and drew Moon and Dayne apart. A look sufficed. He turned back to Corliss, who had managed to lift his head and was trying to speak. Hashknife held up his hand for silence, and the struggling crowd stopped long enough for Corliss to be heard.

"O'Day didn't know," he said painfully, his eyes closed. "It's all right. Moon said you was—a tin—god—"

That was all. The court-room quickly cleared, while the doctor went to work and the crowd waited outside for Hashknife. Two men carried O'Day to the edge of the sidewalk. He seemed too stunned even to ask questions, and his face was twisted painfully over the shock of it all.

HANK LUDDEN, Mary Lane and Armadillo were inside a circle of men, who insisted on shaking their hands, and Hank Ludden hardly seemed to know what it was all about. The sheriff came from the courtroom and halted near Hashknife, who had come out just ahead of him.

"Hartley, how did you figure all that out?" he asked.

The crowd gathered around him, imploring him to tell them.

"I told most of it in there," said Hashknife. "There had to be a way to change the HL brand. It was awful simple to make it into a Five Box. I found out that O'Day was crippled and let Corliss handle his sales and all that. What could be easier than for Corliss to steal HL stock and sell 'em with O'Day's stuff?

"If I had known where to get in touch with Amos, I might a checked up on his buying, and found out that he bought more Five Box cattle than O'Day got paid for, I reckon. But I wasn't so sure that O'Day wasn't mixed up in the stealin' from the HL.

"And when I did figure out that Corliss was the guilty party, Amos Hardy shows up and proceeds to get drunk and stick around with Corliss, so I had no chance to find out anythin'.

"Amos Hardy paid cash. O'Day got paid for his cattle, and Corliss, Naylor, Dayne and Moon got paid for HL cattle. They tried to kill me and Sleepy at McCallville.

"Corliss was clever, but made the mistake of tryin' to kill us through a saloon window. They ruined the firin'-pins on the rifles we borrowed from the sheriff so as to cripple us for long range work. They figured we'd ride back through Crow Rock Cañon in daylight, and they could pick us off. And we might a done it too, if they hadn't overplayed their hand by shootin' through the window.

"They put a note in McLeod's coat, feelin' that me or the sheriff would find it. It sent us to McCallville and almost got us killed.

"I wanted to be sure and I couldn't feel sure until Hardy was killed. He said he had a list of every shipment he had ever bought from Dutch O'Day, and he was goin' to show it to O'Day yesterday. When the sheriff brought O'Day's effects back, that list was gone.

"Corliss killed Hardy to get that list. He couldn't afford to have O'Day know how many cattle had been shipped, because it would be a lot more than O'Day's list showed. So Corliss killed Hardy, took that list and blamed the runaway."

"But I knew nothin' about it," O'Day's face twisted painfully. "I didn't know it, lad."

"I was sure yuh didn't, O'Day. If you had been guilty, Corliss would not have killed Hardy."

Hank Ludden came over to Hashknife, peering at him from beneath his shaggy brows.

"Hartley," he said slowly. Just that. It was enough. Hashknife held out his hand and they gripped tightly.

"I'm glad I didn't get yore letter, Hank," smiled Hashknife. "It was written in the Big Book that the man who told you about me had to die first."

"Yes," said Ludden simply.

Mary did not speak, but the look in her eyes, as she gazed at Hashknife, was payment enough.

"Ah, I'm sorry," muttered O'Day. "Ludden, my men robbed ye for a long time. Put my brand on yer stock. Of this I had no knowledge, but ye'll not lose. I'll make good. It's about all there is left in life for me to make good."

The tall, thin county treasurer pushed his way through the crowd and held out his hand to Mary Lane.

"Congratulations," he blurted. "The—I was just talking to one of the commissioners who was in there—in the courtroom. They have—er—" He winked boldly at Hank Ludden, who had given him the check to issue in monthly payments to Mary. "They have decided to go right on paying you—er—another one hundred and ten dollars per month."

Mary looked at him blankly and at the sheriff, whose mouth was wide open like a fish out of water. Then the sheriff turned and went striding toward his office. It was too much for him. Hashknife and Sleepy overtook him before he reached the office, and he was talking to himself, something about four hundred and forty dollars per month, but did not explain to them.

"I'm goin' to turn McLeod loose," he muttered. "He'll sure be glad to have yuh tell him all about it."

He swung open the door and stepped inside, but Hashknife and Sleepy kept right on going toward the livery stable.

Their room rent was all paid up and they had no baggage to get. Swiftly they saddled and rode out of Arapaho City, circling the town and going away the same way they had come to the town.

The crowd was still in front of the courthouse, probably wondering what had become of Hashknife and Sleepy, but they were doing what they had done many times before—getting away ahead of thanks and hero worship.

They pounded across the Twisted River bridge and along the dusty road, passing the spot where Joe Lane's body had been found and drawing rein only when they saw the old sign—

Arapaho City

"This is a quit-claim deed for my share of the darned thing," read Sleepy. He glanced sidewise at Hashknife. "Shall we get off and sign it, cowboy?"

Hashknife shook his head slowly, looking back down the old road. "No-o-o, I reckon not, Sleepy. Arapaho City and the Twisted River country is pretty good now."

"Pagans," said Sleepy seriously.

"What do yuh mean?"

Sleepy grinned and reached for the makin's of a cigaret.

"Worshipin' a tin god," he said.

The
CAMP-FIRE
A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

WHO were the Stonish Giants and what were the Flying Heads? Historians, writers and anthropologists to the rescue. Also any one else who can furnish information.

Toledo, Ohio.

Chambers, in his novel "The Maid at Arms," used the Iroquois legend of the Stonish Giants and thinks they were the Spaniards. Arthur D. Howden Smith in the *Swain* stories makes them out the Norsemen. Just what is the burden of the evidence? Would like to hear from Smith, Pendexter and others of the *Adventure* writers on the subject. The New York State Librarian, who I understand is an Iroquois, might give some valuable information on the subject.

Also would like to know just what is the legend of the Flying Heads and what is the probable truth of it.—GEO. DEWEY.

UNTIL a year or two ago I'd never heard the world "pisé," a method of building walls by ramming dirt or clay between frames. Sounds like an interesting experiment, but I wonder how it would stand the extreme hot and cold, wet and dry of much of the United States?

Following Camp-Fire custom, T. T. Flynn rises to introduce himself to Camp-Fire on the occasion of his first story in our magazine. Here's luck to his pisé house.

Hyattsville, Maryland.

In making my bow to the older members of "Camp-Fire" I am afraid there isn't a great deal I can say about myself. I am twenty-five, Irish—a little, born and raised in Indiana, six feet two, 190 pounds. Have managed to do a bit of "hitting the grit" and "riding the rods." During the war I worked on the freighters going across with supplies; later on other boats. Quit the sea with a buddy and steered a wholesale candy business through a year and a half of worry and need of money. Did a bit as traveling salesman. Married, packed the candy kettles and slabs away and went on railroad, ending up as locomotive inspector. All the time writing. Spent so much time at it the boss said I didn't care about the job. Decided he was right and left to spend all my time at it. At present I am living in Hyattsville, Md., a suburb of Washington, D. C., writing, trying to build a pisé, or dirt-walled, house, fooling with some bees, delving into the treasures of the Library of Congress and enjoying life very much. —T. T. FLYNN.

* * *

LATELY the letters in the Cæsar controversy have been almost wholly in support of Talbot Mundy. There is a whole lot more in the controversy than such matters as whether Cæsar was or did this, that or the other. It brings out the questions of tolerance, how much thinking of our own do we do, what are our measures of success and greatness, our ideals and the influence of commonly accepted ideals. These unsolicited letters from reader comrades form an interesting cross-section of thought and point of view:

Penders-on-Ewe, Surrey, England.

With keen interest I have followed the controversy in Camp-Fire anent Mr. Mundy's Cæsarisms. In view of Mr. Brodeur's attack upon this writer, I can not longer maintain silence.

MR. BRODEUR demands Mr. Mundy's evidence in denial that Cæsar wrote his Commentaries. He will find it, if he looks in the "De Rebus Galicorum" of Aulus Minutius, Book II, Cambridge Edition, page 431: "This, then, I have seen with my own eyes," says Minutius. Also, in the "Acta Diurna Urbis" of Quintus Tullius, p. 122, Harmon and Wright edition: "It is known to all men how the learned Syracusan secretaries of Cæsar wrote for him his books." Q. Tullius being a nephew of Cicero, this of course disproves the whole argument of Mr. Brodeur.

Again, Mr. Brodeur demands evidence for Cæsar's mendacity as stated by Mr. Mundy. Easily afforded. In "Great Lives," Vol. II, by Blavatsky, is the following statement: "Cæsar being an epileptic, was controlled by the aura of saffron and hence none of his writings can be considered accurate."

BUT Mr. Brodeur's attack upon the Mysteries can be most amply refuted, and Mr. Mundy deserves all praise for his astute perception in this respect. The standard work on the subject is the compilation of Hiram A. Biff, entitled "The Mysteries of Samothrace," which fully supports Mr. Mundy. More especially, Mr. Mundy's statements anent the Druids are emphatically borne out by the researches of our own Oxon. scholar, Sandford Merton; in particular his tracing of theosophy to Druidism and the Hamitic Zenophars, crowned by the French Academy last year, is to be commended to Mr. Brodeur. If he, also, will look into the "Usque Tandem" of Q. Publius Naso, he will find Mr. Mundy's character of Cæsar sustained by eyewitnesses, and will perceive that he has no other course than to gracefully yield in scholarship to the opponent whom he has accused of illiteracy.

Trusting, sir, that you may find this information definitive, I beg to remain.—J. A. G. ENDERS.

Boston, Massachusetts.

I have been greatly interested in Mundy's stories of Cæsar's British campaigns and feel that the viewpoint he takes is entirely defensible. His critics, so far as the letters published in your June 30th issue show, seem to miss the salient points and wander far afield. Mr. Davis devotes a large part of his letter to extolling what the Romans did a hundred and more years after Cæsar's death, and Mr. Hathaway to the days when Romans had respect for law and authority. This may have been true in the days of the Scipios, or of the five good Emperors, but was certainly not the case from times of Marius to the firm establishment of Augustus.

The important points appear to me to be as follows:

1. Was Cæsar defeated in his attempt on Britain?
2. Would a strong, well balanced, unselfish non-Roman naturally oppose him in extending Roman dominion?
3. Were there stories current at the time of Cæsar's licentiousness, faithlessness and ambition which an enemy would naturally believe and in accordance with which he would govern his own words and acts?

If these three questions can be answered affirmatively, the *Tros* stories are justified; that is, *Tros* is properly shown as an heroic mind fighting on the side of liberty successfully, and not unduly credulous in regard to Cæsar's reputation if he considered him a danger to women and his promises untrustworthy.

THE answer to the first question is so clearly evidenced by the event that not one of Mundy's critics mentions it. The answer to the second question is given by the attitude of much of the world in opposing recently the extension of the blessings of German Kultur. Most of us fortunately still place freedom above law and order imposed from without. If this is true of intelligent Americans, Egyptians and Hindoos today, it is reasonable to assume it is true of an intelligent Greek 2000 years ago.

As for the third question, the scandal of the capital would not lose verisimilitude by transmission to the provinces. The stories of Cæsar's hitting the high spots were certainly not out of character with the acknowledged enormity of his debts. You will find Mundy's view of Cæsar as a libertine is similar to Lord Macaulay's as given in his "Fragments of a Roman Tale." *Tros* fairly claims that Cæsar would do in Britain what he did do in Egypt, and what Romans later did to the daughters of Boadicea according to Tacitus (Annals, Book 14).

As for faithlessness and ambition, Cæsar may have been, as the critics state, no worse than his times, or no worse than our own times under war conditions. But this would not be any reason for an enemy wisely trusting him. That Cæsar's ambition for Rome was his controlling motive is as clearly shown in the latest *Tros* story as in Professor Davis' "A Friend of Cæsar." This last was an excellent story of a patriotic Roman. Mundy's is as good and logical and true a story of "An Enemy of Cæsar." Both personalities existed at the time and are equally worthy of a place among historical novels.

THERE remains the purely technical point of the possibility of a connection between devotees of the Samothracian mysteries and the Druids. Now the Samothracian mysteries were those of the Cabiri —(See Strabo 10-3-7 and 10-3-20, also note on 10-3-21 Bohn; Herodotus 2-51). The Cabiri were a powerful order among the Phenicians who used a carving of one as a patron deity on their ships (Herodotus 3-37, also Rawlinson History of Phenicia—P. 280). The Phenicians controlled the tin trade with Britain for centuries and had an important station at the Scilly Isles (Strabo 3-5-11).

The Cabiri finally moved their headquarters to Britain 10 B. C. (See Fessenden's "Deluged Civilization of the Caucausus Isthmus"—P. 87, also Strabo 4-4-6). As Britain was still unconquered, the native religion remained, and the fact of this move would indicate that here was a place where the Cabiri already had influence.

Not such a wild notion, then, to connect Samothrace and the Druids.—R. E. Briggs.

Ottawa, Canada.

I will back Mundy's opinion of Julius Cæsar against Davis. It is not a question of Imperialism at all. Nor does Mundy so treat it. The decline and fall of the Republic (Empire) definitely may be said to commence or to have taken a course which could not be changed when Cæsar crossed the Rubicon. His remark as to the "mysteries" shows that he does not understand the nature of those Mundy describes, which were *not* orgiastic.—Arthur C. Temmis.

Richmond, Virginia.

I have been a reader of *Adventure* for more than a decade, yet I have not ventured to speak at Camp-Fire. Now that my friend, Mr. Talbot Mundy (I say friend, although I have not had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Mundy personally; I have been an enthusiastic reader of his books for a number of years) is being attacked I feel that I should say my little bit in his defense.

In the issue of June 30th, Messrs. Elmer Davis, Frank R. Whitzel, and James Hathaway bitterly assail Mr. Mundy for daring to speak evil of the Great Cæsar. Mr. Clements Heaton is the only one who gently hints that Mr. Mundy might be partly right. I do not know any of the above named men. I have read two of Mr. Davis's books and have formed an opinion of him as being a humorist of the highest type, but I have read any number of Mr. Mundy's works and they have led me to believe that he is not only an excellent fictionist but also a deep thinker and a philosopher of note. As to being a historian, any biographer of this century who takes the life of Cæsar as his subject necessarily has to use either Cæsar's own works or those of his contemporaries as their authorities. Is there a man living today who can prove that the Commentaries are the truth, and nothing but the truth? No. Then has not Mr. Mundy the right to accept the works of the Antis as well as Mr. Davis to accept the writings of the Pros? But this is enough of that.

I WELCOMED the *Tros* stories not because of their possible historical value but because of their probable aid to Universal Peace. That may sound queer, but think a minute. The first step that must be taken toward Universal Peace is to show up a bunch of glorified fighters. Cæsar is one of them. That he was no worse than the rest of his troops or the Romans at the time is no reason that he should be held up to the world as a mighty man. Cæsar was not a first class fighter, he can not compare with Hannibal. He was not a defender of the home and fireside, every move that he made was for Cæsar. Every war he fought was for personal gain. As long as we have this sort of a man listed as one of the world's greatest, then there is not a chance for Universal Peace.

I did not understand, at first, the bitterness of the letters in "Camp-Fire" until I remembered the attacks made (in England) on Mr. Shaw's "Man of Destiny." An iconoclast has a hard time of it in this enlightened age of ours.—John H. Tyree.

Hollis Depot, New Hampshire.

Having read their letters in Camp-Fire of June 30th, I would like to ask Mr. Davis, Mr. Whitzel and Mr. Hathaway a few questions and state a few ideas of my own on the *Tros* stories.

These three gentlemen do not deny Mr. Mundy's statements that Cæsar wrote his Commentaries or had the supervision thereof, that he did cut off the hands of fifty thousand Gauls on one occasion, that he was a poor sailor, and that he repeated his mistake of placing his ships where they could be destroyed by the elements off the coast of Britain just as the Germans repeated their mistake of 1914 and 1918 at the Marne by leaving their flank vulnerable, nor do they deny Mr. Mundy's statement that Cæsar's invasions of Britain were failures. Yet these same gentlemen say that Mr. Mundy's characterization of Cæsar is wrong, that he was not cruel, they fail to show us in what manner he was a success in navigation. Therefore Mr. Mundy's conception of Cæsar ought to be as near accurate as the next man's.

MR. DAVIS draws into his side of the argument the meeting at Rheims in 70 A. D. of the Gauls. Comrade, let us forget that and try to understand that Mr. Mundy is writing of Rome and Cæsar in the years covering the life of Cæsar and especially that part of his life which he (Cæsar) occupied in invading Britain. Mr. Davis concedes Mr. Mundy a point when he says Mundy has some color for his argument in that Rome was at its worst, politically and morally and from the standpoint of administrative efficiency in Cæsar's day. Now "in Cæsar's day," let me repeat, is the period of which Mundy writes. I did not understand Mr. Davis that Mr. Mundy never said that his conceptions of the Gauls and Britons of Cæsar's time are history. I believe he stated in his letter of February 10th in "Camp-Fire" that the Britons were probably the waning tag end of a high civilization and goes on to say why he thinks so. Of course, as he says it, it is problematical. Mr. Davis ridicules Mr. Mundy's statement that Rome stamped out the

"Mysteries" but he does not come out and say *who*, if not Rome, did stamp them out. The fact remains that they were stamped out. And I believe that other members of Camp-Fire as well as myself, would like to have Mr. Davis tell us who was guilty. Until then I prefer to side with Mundy on that point.

Now let us look over Mr. Hathaway's letter. He arrived at the conclusion that Mr. Mundy is full of pink prunes. Grant that being the case, I wish Mr. Mundy would reveal where he obtains these said prunes that I may also become as learned as he. I have read *Adventure* since 1916 and have also read Mr. Mundy's previous letters to Camp-Fire as well as his stories, so do not arrive at these conclusions from one letter or from one story. Mr. Hathaway speaks of the women as part of the spoils of war, which is a fact, but he also says they did not mind it much as long as they were treated half way decent. How does he get that way? Did the French and Belgian women mind it in our last fracas? Any one with any savvy knows the answer. But it didn't do them any good to raise a fuss so the only thing they could do was bow to the inevitable. So with women in Cæsar's time, and in most countries, if not all since time began. Mr. Hathaway says that what Rome gave us: namely—law, good roads, respect for authority and the value of citizenship is worth one thousand of Mr. Mundy's stories. Mr. Mundy, you are a genius par excellence if one thousand of your stories are really worth these four things. Mr. Hathaway started out to censor you, but to my mind he gave you unstinted praise. He says you are crazy. Mr. Mundy, does he realize one must first have brains to become eligible to be crazy? So, permit me to say, you have something on him after all.

Now Mr. Whitzel, you start your letter by dragging in Theodore Roosevelt and stating that all the slander *et cetera* directed against him isn't true because:—"that happens to have been disproved in court." Surely you are not that ignorant Mr. Whitzel. My, what an argument! Our courts are what? Listen to this. I once heard an old gentleman say, "In my youth they called them courts of justice, now they call them courts of law." Ain't it the truth?

As to Cæsar's licentiousness it matters very little except that from what I can learn I believe I can safely say he never overlooked a bet. You say you can easily refute "other slanders" of Mundy's. Well, why don't you? Camp-Fire will listen, is listening. Show us and I'll wager Mr. Mundy is as open-minded and ready to be convinced as any one.

I think Mr. Mundy's stories are certainly well worth reading, in as much as they give us something new to think about which is really a blessing in that it keeps our minds from the proverbial rut. Suppose all of his ideas and theories prove to be wrong, does that necessarily mean his stories border on the criminal? Some would class Mr. Mundy with H. G. Wells, Conan Doyle and Einstein. Does that make him a criminal? Surely not. To my mind it elevates him rather than to the contrary. As to those who refuse to concur with a thought merely because it is not as they have been taught I can only say, "None are so blind as those who won't see."—H. W. Chapman.

Talpa, Texas.

I have read the letter from L. S. Hughes where he proves the character of the Romans by quoting Josephus. It is so long ago I studied history I have forgotten names. When Josephus was besieged (I think in Joppa) the priests hid in an underground passage. The priests took an oath to kill themselves, but Josephus, being what we today would call a "smooth guy," knew he could save himself from being crucified. Vespasian and his son Titus being unassuming men, never thought of becoming Cæsars. But Josephus knew the soldiers would follow Vespasian. At the time there were three pretenders for the throne, fighting each other. As the army of Alexander was by far the strongest, Josephus knew Vespasian had at least four chances out of five to win, so when Josephus was captured, he told his captors he wanted to appeal to Cæsar. When he was brought before Vespasian he said, "You are Cæsar." He told him God appeared to him and said that Vespasian would be Cæsar. Vespasian, being superstitious, thought that if God helped him he had a chance. So he held Josephus prisoner to see if the prophecy came true.

After Vespasian became Cæsar and Josephus wrote his history it would have been very foolish of Josephus to have written anything against the Roman Cæsar. You can tell Josephus' character by his absolute ignoring of Christ.—John W. Anderson.

Rochester, New York.

The files of *Adventure* will show that Mr. Talbot Mundy promptly and cheerfully admitted that he had made some erroneous statements (in a letter, I think) about the great pyramid, thereby demonstrating that he loved the truth more than his own opinions. I wonder how many of us have that same preference. What others have written about Julius Cæsar is merely hearsay. We can guess how much of it is true, but we do not know. Many years ago I painfully translated Cæsar's Commentaries. Before that I had supposed that J. C. was a nobler Roman than Marcus Aurelius. Since then I have been unable to understand how any open-minded man can read what that great soldier and politician wrote about himself and fail to observe the man's treachery, cruelty and supreme conceit. Of course, it is hard to find a man who is open-minded on all subjects. I would like to be, but do not know which of my settled convictions are the result of prejudice, desire to believe and other errors. It is hard to find out and be sure. We are the victims of fixed ideas, the truth of which we never question. When another man questions them plausibly, we are disturbed because we do not wish to believe that we are mistaken. It is easier and pleasanter to believe that the other man is mistaken; and if the man is wrong, why not silence him and thus remove the cause of our disturbance? Few of us favor free speech by those whose opinions are opposed to our own pet beliefs. We "are the children of them which killed the prophets."

I have become convinced that ignorance is the only fault that can be found in any man, a conviction that enables me to regard all men tolerantly, especially those who agree with me. I believe that virtue and knowledge are identical, although everybody knows better and the old gentleman who promulgated that idea died of unpopularity and left no estate.

Incidentally, Thomas Paine, who was not a Theosophist, an Occultist or an Atheist, but a Deist and the able enemy of revealed religion, spoke highly of the scientific attainments of the Celtic Druids and commended their "dignified" and philosophical religion." All of the Camp-Fire gunners appear to have a world of ammunition.—CURTIS BUNCE.

HERE is a friendly personal letter not intended for publication and with the writer's name consequently not printed:

With much interest I have read your comments on the Cæsar matter and am tempted to write not on that subject, but to you personally. While I think you are hardly fair to those who understood your earlier remarks as endorsing Mr. Mundy's views, I deem you much more unfair to yourself, if you are really sincere in your condemnation of your "sheeplike" attitude. Waiving the point that you do protest too much, I beg to say your self strictures are quite undeserved.

IT HAPPENS that I have made a particular study of the late Roman Republic and have consulted the original authorities so far as possible. But after all and in the last analysis, I have accepted what some one else has said. Had the discussion been upon another subject, the Nebular Hypothesis, the Ming Dynasty in China or the Mendelian Theory, I would have been compelled to say with you, I accepted the current opinion without investigating for myself. This must necessarily be so. Knowledge has become so broad that no man can possibly investigate every subject and form his own opinion. He must choose his specialty and master it, accepting the results of other workers in all other fields without examining the proof. This is such a truism, so much a matter of course that I, at least, gave little heed to your remarks about an open mind, and took it that you had been shaken loose from your former belief and had accepted Mr. Mundy's opinions. You have no cause to censure yourself for adopting the generally accepted result of the work of others in all lines save that or those which you have made your own.

AS TO Cæsar, you need not be surprised at the feeling shown in the various letters you have received. He was the very pivot of the Ancient World about whom the entire structure turned to its new position. He bulks too large for impartial treatment. Even the historians, modern as well as ancient, can not lay aside their prejudices and treat of Cæsar with the same calm judicial temper they otherwise display. Moreover, each writer thinks he needs must, for the sake of originality, offer a new estimate of Cæsar. I once amused myself by drawing up a list of twenty odd such estimates, and the result would surely surprise you. They ranged from Oman, who deemed him a dissolute, light-headed adventurer, to Froude who regarded him as hardly inferior to Jesus from a moral standpoint. Sihler believes him the meanest of mankind, while Mommsen calls him "absolute perfection." If these men disagree so far, how can you or I be blamed whatever may be our view?

As you see, this letter is not written with a view to publication, but simply to make the point that you are wrong in censuring yourself for holding an opinion without personal study on a subject which you do not pretend to have mastered.—E. F. G.

ALL that E. F. G. says about no one's being able to study all subjects sufficiently to form opinions of his own is true. But it is not the whole truth. Like every one else I realize there are millions of subjects I can not take time to investigate fully or could not master if I had the time. On these I must accept the opinions of those who have specialized on them. But the whole question of being "sheeplike" lies in the meaning of "accept." If I accept their verdicts as final I am sheeplike. But if I say to myself something like the following, I am doing all that can be expected of me:

"I know who are accepted as best authorities on this subject and that their verdict is so-and-so. Therefore it is the best verdict now obtainable by me who am not a specialist and I accept it but only *as such.* New study by specialists, or new data, may at any time change the accepted verdict. I will not let myself be hidebound or intolerant or sleepily indifferent."

In the Cæsar matter I was sheeplike, swallowed the commonly accepted verdict whole, said an unconscious "That's that" to myself, never even questioned its finality —just sat down for life, sleepily hidebound in a single point of view. Then Mr. Mundy came along and jarred me awake. So I thanked him for it—for making me shake myself out of the sheeplike attitude into an open-minded one. I did not accept his theory as final, but I ceased to accept the old one as final and remembered that human knowledge increases as the years and centuries move along. That's a wholesome mental attitude; my former one wasn't.

What I think of Cæsar, or even the question of whether I am sheeplike, is in itself of very little importance to the world, but it is vastly important because of the fact that I am merely a sample of the general human attitude toward progress and new knowledge. In cussing myself I was cussing most of you as well, and knew that I was.

We Americans boast a good deal about our superior enlightenment, freedom and progressiveness. As a matter of fact we're at least as hidebound, enslaved and intolerant as most other nations. Our strides ahead in material civilization, or what we call civilization, have nothing to do with it.

There can not be much real progress, freedom, enlightenment, tolerance and understanding among us until we make ourselves realize our present lack of them.

Cæsar was this, that or the other. It doesn't matter greatly. But our attitude of mind toward this or any other subject matters a very great deal.

* * *

IN A way this letter from Gordon Young of our writers' brigade belongs in our discussion of Julius Cæsar, but tampered brands and six-masted square-riggers are also brought up by the letter, so here it is by itself:

> I was glad to see what Talbot Mundy had recently to say of Cæsar. I don't know that the college professors and such will make a row; but if they do, Camp-Fire can get some *scholastic* confirmation on Mr. Mundy's viewpoint from Thomas Gordon's "Tacitus," originally published 1728. Through several folio pages Gordon gave J. Cæsar a very fine lambasting, and as much as said that subsequent historians had been blind and stupid to accept the fellow at his own valuation of himself.
>
> There are two things that, when you get around to it, you might try in Camp-Fire. One is the milk-weed brand. I was told recently by an ex-Texas Ranger that the milk-weed juice (used fresh) would make a more deceptive brand alteration than wire or blanket. I never heard of the milk-weed stunt—never saw any in Colorado. The ex-Ranger said the rustler he knew of planted the stuff in Texas and used it for changing brands.
>
> The other thing is this: Is there, or has there ever been, such a thing as a six-mast square-rigger? I never saw one; never heard of one until a few days ago when a deep-waterman pulled that on me and almost lost his temper because I gently intimated that there was no such animal. He said they were *common* up around Norway. I've never been in that part of the world.—GORDON YOUNG.

* * *

AS TO the buying of scalps as a method of organized white warfare. Wilkeson O'Connell touches on the subject in his story appearing in this issue:

> Ithaca, New York.
>
> There is documentary evidence in Albany that Burgoyne did buy scalps. I haven't seen the papers myself; but a friend, who was majoring in history, had them copied for a thesis. Of course, there is the Burgoyne-Gates correspondence to show that Burgoyne, personally, hated and disapproved of it; and it might have been carried on without his direct cognizance. But St. Leger may have been, probably was, of a very different mind. A veteran of the French and Indian War, he would find it neither a new nor a shocking idea. Elson (Henry William; "History of the United States of America") states: "It is certain that the bloody work was approved by him (George III) and instigated by his still more heartless minister, Lord George Germain." This refers, however, not to bounties in particular, but to the whole system of Indian warfare. I should rest my case on the fact that it never has been proved that bounties were not offered and paid.—WILKESON O'CONNELL.

* * *

OUR old slave trade—and the blame for it needn't be laid on the South alone. Something from Bill Adams in connection with his story in this issue:

> I wonder just how many Americans today really know anything about the appalling devilments of our slave trade?
>
> I wonder, if we were herded by some powerful race, to whom our knowledge was as savagery, into ships of the sky and borne beyond the moon to some far distant star and set to toil there without recompense, despised, and used as we today use animals we breed for our own profits, how we should feel about it?
>
> Perhaps some of your readers will think that my story is overdrawn. It is not. One of our good slaving captains dropped some 800 slaves into the sea on a dark night, lashed to his cables, and when the searching warships came aboard him showed them his empty holds. There was no evidence. The octopus and sharks were eating it beneath his keel. Mere manacles and slave decks did not constitute evidence enough.
>
> We pay for it today, and shall pay yet for many years to be.—BILL ADAMS.

* * *

INDEXES by volume for most of the volumes of *Adventure* back to about 1912 are on hand and will be sent free to any reader who will pay the necessary postage. Allow about one-half cent per index for postage and be sure to specify the volumes for which you wish the indexes when you write. And remember that the supply of some of the indexes is very low and may be exhausted by the time your letter is received.

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons, etc., runs in the last issue of each month.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Missing Friends or Relatives

(See Lost Trails in next issue.)

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL BUY: October, 1914; and February and May, 1915 issues at $1 each.—Address Rudolph R. Krebs, 405 West Milwaukee Avenue, Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin.

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Glad to look at any manuscripts. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the second issue of each month. Address letters regarding Stations to Laurence Jordan.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *unstamped* envelope.

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This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure.")

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1 American Waters
BERIAH BROWN, Couperville, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing, commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. The Sea Part 2 British Waters
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.* Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

3. The Sea Part 3 Statistics of American Shipping
HARRY E. RIESEBERG, Apartment 347-A, Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the United States, Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.

4. Islands and Coasts Part 1 Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.* Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*See next section.*)

5. Islands Part 2 Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Languages, mining, minerals, fishing, sugar, fruit and tobacco production.

6. Islands Part 3 Cuba
WALLACE MONTGOMERY, Warner Sugar Co. of Cuba, Miranda, Oriente, Cuba. Geography, industries, people, customs, hunting, fishing, history and government.

7. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1 Cook Islands, Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

8. ★ South Sea Islands Part 2 French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn).
CHARLES BROWN, JR., Boite No. 167, Papeete, Tahiti, Society Islands, South Pacific Ocean. Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture. (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

9. ★ Australia and Tasmania
PHILLIP NORMAN, 842 Military Road, Mosman, Sydney, N. S. W., Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

10. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

11. ★ New Guinea
L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions. Questions regarding the measures or policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered (*Send International Reply Coupon for eleven cents.*)

12. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, L. B. 4., Quartzsite, Ariz. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

13. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 1402 Lytton Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

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14. Japan
Grace P. T. Knudson, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

15. Asia Part 1 Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Borneo
Captain Beverley Giddings, care *Adventure.* Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

16. Asia Part 2 Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan
Gordon MacCreagh, 21 East 14th St., New York. Hunting, trading, traveling, customs.

17. Asia Part 3 Coast of Northeastern Siberia, and Adjoining Waters
Capt. C. L. Oliver, care *Adventure.* Natives, language, mining, trading, customs, climate. Arctic Ocean: Winds, currents, depths, ice conditions, walrus-hunting.

18. ★ Asia Part 4 North China, Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan
George W. Twomey, M. D., 60 Rue de l'Amirauté, Tientsin, China. Natives, languages, trading, customs, climate and hunting. (*Send International Reply Coupon for five cents.*)

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Robert Simpson, care *Adventure.* Labor, trade, expenses, outfitting, living conditions, tribal customs, transportation.

20. ★ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo
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21. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
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22. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East
R. G. Waring, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

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25. Africa Part 7 Egypt, Tunis, Algeria
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

26. ✠ Africa Part 8 Sudan
W. T. Moffat, Opera House, Southport, Lancashire, England. Climate, prospects, trading, traveling, customs, history. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

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J. F. Edwards, David Lane, East Hampton, N. Y. Travel, history, geography, politics, races, languages, customs, commerce, outdoor life, general information.

28. Asia Minor
(Editor to be appointed.)

29. Bulgaria, Roumania
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

30. Albania
Robert S. Townsend, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

31. Jugo-Slavia and Greece
Lieut. William Jenna, Fort Clayton, Panama, C. Z. History, politics, customs, geography, language, travel, outdoor life.

32. Scandinavia
Robert S. Townsend, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

33. Finland, Lapland and Russia
Aleko E. Lilius, care *Adventure.* History, customs, travel, shooting, fishing, big game, camping, climate, sports, export and import, industries, geography, general information. In the case of Russia, political topics, outside of historical facts will not be discussed.

34. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
Fred. F. Fleischer, care *Adventure.* History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

35. ✠ Great Britain
Thomas Bowen Partington, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., W. C. 2, London, England. General information. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

36. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile
Edgar Young, care *Adventure.* Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

37. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil
Paul Vanorden Shaw, Oakwood Ave.,Harbor View Beach, South Norwalk, Conn. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

38. South America Part 3 Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay
William R. Barbour, care *Adventure.* Geography, travel, agriculture, cattle, timber, inhabitants, camping and exploration, general information. Questions regarding employment not answered.

39. Central America
Charles Bell Emerson, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

40. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

41. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. Mahaffey, Box 304, San José, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

42. Mexico Part 3 Southeastern
W. Russell Sheets, 1121 Columbia Rd., Washington, D. C. Federal Territory of Quinta Roo, Yucatan, Campeche. Travel, geography, business conditions, exploration, inhabitants, history and customs.

43. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land, Region of Northern Quebec and Northern Ontario (except Strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin
S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

44. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario
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T. F. Phillips, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

47. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta
(Editor to be appointed.) Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

48. ✠ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin
Reece H. Hague, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

49. ✠ Canada Part 7 Southeastern Quebec
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50. Canada Part 8 Newfoundland
C. T. James, Bonaventure Ave., St. Johns, Newfoundland. Hunting, fishing, trapping, auto and canoe trips, topography; general information. (*Send International Reply Coupon for five cents.*)

51. Canada Part 9 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island
Fred L. Bowden, 312 High Street, Newark, N. J. Lumbering, hunting, fishing, trapping, auto and canoe trips, topography, farming and homesteading; general information.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for five cents.*)
✠ (*Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

52. Alaska

Theodore S. Solomons, 6720 Leland Way, Hollywood, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

53. Baffinland and Greenland

Victor Shaw, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

54. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.

E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

55. Western U. S. Part 2 New Mexico

H. F. Robinson, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M. Agriculture, automobile routes, Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance; oil-fields; hunting, fishing, camping; history, early and modern.

56. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.

Frank Middleton, 509 Frémont St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

57. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains

Fred W. Egleston, 606 West Lamme, Bozeman, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

58. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country

R. T. Newman, 1001 Park St., Anaconda, Mont. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, history and inhabitants.

59. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.

J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

60. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.

Joseph Mills Hanson, care *Adventure.* Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

61. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.

John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure.* Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

62. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan

John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure.* Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

63. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River

Geo. A. Zerr, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See section* 64.)

64. Middle Western U. S. Part 5 Great Lakes

H. C. Gardner, 1909 Stout St., Denver, Colo. Seamanship, navigation, courses and distances, reefs and shoals, lights and landmarks, charts; laws, fines, penalties; river navigation.

65. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Adirondacks, New York; Lower Miss. (St. Louis down), Atchafalaya across La. swamps, St. Francis River, Arkansas Bottoms, North and East Shores of Lake Mich.

Raymond S. Spears, Inglewood, Calif. Transcontinental and other auto-trail tours (Lincoln, National, Old Santa Fé, Yellowstone, Red Ball, Old Spanish Trail, Dixie Highway, Ocean to Ocean, Pike's Peak); regional conditions, outfits, suggestions; skiff, outboard, small launch river and lake tripping and cruising; trapping; fresh water and button shelling; wildcraft, camping, nature study.

66. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers

Howard A. Shannon, care of *Adventure.* Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

67. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville

Howard A. Shannon, care of *Adventure.* Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

68. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians

William R. Barbour, care *Adventure.* Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

69. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.

Hapsburg Liebe, care of *Adventure.* Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

70. Eastern U. S. Part 6. Maine

Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. For all territory *west* of the Penobscot river. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

71. Eastern U. S. Part 7 Eastern Maine

H. B. Stanwood, East Sullivan, Me. For all territory *east* of the Penobscot River. Hunting, fishing, canoeing, mountaineering, guides; general information.

72, Eastern U. S. Part 8 Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., and Mass.

Howard R. Voight, 35 Dawson Ave., West Haven, Conn, Fishing, hunting, travel, roads; business conditions, history.

73. Eastern U. S. Part 9 New Jersey

(Editor to be appointed.) Topography, hunting, fishing; automobile routes; history; general information.

74, Eastern U. S. Part 10 Maryland

Lawrence Edmund Allen, 201 Bowery Ave., Frostburg, Md. Mining, touring, summer resorts, historical places, general information.

A.—Radio

Donald McNicol, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

Victor Shaw, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads—songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. Gordon, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Mass.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—**All Shotguns,** including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure.*

2.—**All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers,** including foreign and American makes. Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—**Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800.** Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. (Editor to be appointed.)

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure.* Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Forestry in the United States

Ernest W. Shaw, South Carver, Mass. Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild-animal life in the Forests.

G.—Tropical Forestry

William R. Barbour, care *Adventure.* Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

H.—Aviation

Lieut.-Col. W. G. Schauffler, Jr., 2940 Newark St., N. W., Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

I.—Army Matters, United States and Foreign

Fred. F. Fleischer, care *Adventure*. *United States:* Military history, military policy. National Defense Act of 1920. Regulations and matters in general for organized reserves. Army and uniform regulations, infantry drill regulations, field service regulations. Tables of organization. Citizens' military training camps. *Foreign:* Strength and distribution of foreign armies before the war. Uniforms. Strength of foreign armies up to date. History of armies of countries covered by Mr. Fleischer in general "Ask Adventure" section. *General:* Tactical questions on the late war. Detailed information on all operations during the late war from the viewpoint of the German high command. Questions regarding enlisted personnel and officers, except such as are published in Officers' Directory, can not be answered.

J.—Navy Matters

Lieut. Francis V. Greene, U. S. N. R., 245 Bergen Street, Brooklyn, N. Y. Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. International and constitutional law concerning Naval and maritime affairs.

K.-American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal

Arthur Woodward, 1244¼ Leighton Ave., Los Angeles, Calif. Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.

L.—First Aid on the Trail

Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb. Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake-bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Meeting all health hazard, the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.

M.—Health-Building Outdoors

Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb. How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel. Tropical hygiene. General health-building, safe exercise, right food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.

N.—Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada

R. T. Newman, 1001 Park St., Anaconda, Mont. General-office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General information.

O.—Herpetology

Dr. G. K. Noble, American Museum of Natural History, 77th St., and Central Park West, New York, N. Y. General information concerning reptiles (snakes, lizards, turtles, crocodiles) and amphibians (frogs, toads, salamanders); their customs, habits and distribution.

P.—Entomology

Dr. Frank E. Lutz, Ramsey, N. J. General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.; distribution.

Q.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write Laurence Jordan, care *Adventure.*

For general information on **U. S.** and its **possessions** write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries**, the Dept., of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico**, and customs receiverships in **Santo Domingo** and **Haiti**, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For **Alaska**, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii**, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba**, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on **Latin-American matters** or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.**, Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **State Police of any State**, Francis H. Bent, Jr., Farmingdale, N. J.

For **Canal Zone**, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National **Rifle** Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver** Ass'n. W. A. Morrall, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National Parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Wash., D. C,

For whereabouts of **Navy men**, Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, Wash., D. C.

Ranching in the West

SOMETHING you can not learn about from books:

Request:—"Would you be good enough to enlighten me on the subject of stock raising as it is carried on in the West today? I wonder if ranching on a small scale in these modern days is possible, let alone reasonably profitable. If so, can you refer me to any books on the subject that will start me on the right road toward the knowledge of how it is done? Roosevelt's 'Ranch Life' and other works describing the bonanza days of yore are delightfully entertaining, but are hardly applicable to these trying times.

Of course, I will be more than grateful for any information you yourself can give me on the subject."—Charles B. Wood, New York, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Middleton:—Glad to be of service to you. Ranching on a small scale, at least in Colorado and Wyoming—the territory which I cover for the magazine—is entirely practicable and is being carried on, profitably, by hundreds of small ranchers. Of course we have the large ranches also, but they are really the exception instead of the rule. The open range is fast disappearing in desirable localities and thoroughbred stock is replacing the range herd of some years ago. Small ranches of from 320 acres (one-half section), on up, raise cattle or sheep, at a profit. You see one doesn't get into the "big" ranch class until one gets up to the ownership of something like fifteen sections or more of land.

Many of these small ranchers run their cattle or sheep, whichever it may be, on Forest Reserve land during the grazing season, usually from May until October, paying so much per head for this privilege to the Government through the medium of the Forest Ranger, saving their home pastures for late pasturing and cutting and stacking enough hay through the summer months to carry them through the winter's feeding of such stuff as they count on holding over.

I am enclosing a small leaflet which may prove of interest to you. I would like for you also to address a letter of inquiry to Mr. A. D. Faville, Commissioner of Agriculture, State Capitol Bldg., Cheyenne, Wyo., requesting that he mail you literature on stock raising in this State. Address also a letter to State Immigration Commissioner, State House Bldg., Denver, Colorado, inquiring as to the possible future of northwest Colorado (Moffat County). This part of Colorado has a very rosy future. Should you be interested, write also to secretary, Commercial Club, Craig, Colo., for information as to Moffat County.

I do not know of any books that can give you a correct idea of the way small ranching is carried on. The very best way is to go into the country one has in mind and work on one of the ranches for a season or two, thus getting an insight of the way things are carried on and getting a practical idea of how to run things for yourself. I strongly advise this method in all cases of the prospective homesteader or in case of a person moving from the East into this country which is new to them.

I trust that you will not hesitate to let me know, if at any future time you feel that I may be of assistance to you.

The full statement of the departments, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

New Guinea

ABOUT which the expert must be pessimistic.

Request:—"I note in *Adventure* that you are prepared to answer questions about New Guinea.

1. What are the prospects of employment?
2. What opening for trading, shell-getting, etc., with a boat, say twenty-five tons?

I am thirty-five years of age, single, sober and healthy. I spent fifteen years in Florida, also Central and South America, and worked at the following occupations: carpenter, cook, seaman, rigger, boat-builder, fitting and running oil engines to 100 H.P., fishing and oyster dredging. Also as interpreter. (I speak Spanish and Italian.) I am at present fishing with a thirty-foot cutter built by myself. Capital about twelve hundred pounds.

1. Are any white skippers or engineers on the trading schooners? (Class of certificate?)
2. Any jobs for government or plantations, running or repairing launches? Any jobs as tally clerk on wharf?
3. Any chance for white man, boat-builder?
4. What about Japanese in New Guinea? Any other information on these lines you can supply."—Address WILLIAM J. HUDSON, Macknade P. O., Herbert River, North Queensland.

Reply, by Mr. Armit:—You will think this letter is written by a pessimist, for I am unable to advise you to come across here on spec. I take your queries in the order you ask them:

1. Prospects of employment are very small. Most jobs are filled from Australia. The demand for men is not great, as the total white population of the Territory of Papua is only 1,200.
2. Trading is already well filled; competition is keen. Pearl-shelling is a dead letter at present, but a twenty-five-ton boat is too large, the usual size being from 10 to 15 tons, lugger rigged.
3. There are some of the larger trading vessels that have European masters and engineers. I do not know the class of certificate held by these men but presume it would be the British Board of Trade.
4. Very few plantations own launches. Most of the transport business is in the hands of the firms that run the coastal trading vessels.
5. Boat-builders, like all other artisans, are usually brought from Australia when a vacancy occurs.
6. There are only about a dozen Japanese in the Territory.

With your knowledge of trades you should do well anywhere in Australia where there is so much more opportunity for business than in this small colony. However, if you are still keen on seeing Papua, you could come across and look around, but I do not think you would be able to discover anything worth trying.

Sorry I can not be more optimistic.

Brazil

WHERE the use of Spanish is most unwelcome.

Request:—"I have been knocking around the tropics for some twenty-five years, being a mechanical engineer. I am thinking of going down to Brazil and settling down there, possibly taking a 60-100-ton freight boat with me, with a view to trading and freighting in the higher reaches of the Amazon. Perhaps you can give me some general information in addition to replying to the following queries:

I have had many years in the tropics, and am accustomed to tackling any kind of job and thought of getting a job for three to six months before starting up on my own, to get a little local color! I've only got $3,000 and don't want to take *too* much risk with it. My present boat is 140 tons capacity on six-foot draft with two 75-H. P. crude oil engines, which I think might be O. K. for the project, if not I can sell her for a *good* figure and *get* the right craft. Any help you can give me will be ***very much*** appreciated, and I hope you won't hesitate to let me know if I can reciprocate in any way.

1. Will Spanish be of considerable use throughout the country, or where is Spanish mostly used?
2. Is employment fairly easy to obtain for a *good*, all-round mechanical engineer. (Locomotive, Marine, Diesel, Gas and Oil.) Are wages fairly good?
3. What sort of vessel would be best for trading up the Amazon (from 50-100 tons). Can one obtain crude oil or gas oil in Manaos or higher up?
4. Is living cheap in Para, Manaos, Iquitos, etc? Is it *fairly* cool in the higher reaches of the river? (For one who is used to *hot* countries.)
5. Where can I get a *reliable* map of the upper part of the Amazon?"—J. LOCKE, Maracaibo, Venezuela.

Reply, by Mr. Paul Vanorden Shaw:—The use of Spanish in Brazil by foreigners, especially by Englishmen and Americans, is most unwelcome. Spanish is spoken nowhere in Brazil, excepting possibly on some frontiers, but Portuguese is the official and only used language in the country. Though similar to Spanish, it has its own history, literature, traditions, etc., and these are as revered as is English by an Englishman.

It should not be difficult for a man of your experience to get a job. If with a native firm the wages will be small in pounds or dollars, but you might get much more with some foreign concern. However your best chances are in the industrial city of Sao Paulo (South Brazil) for that kind of work and not on the north or Amazon where business is now practically dead due to the slump in the rubber markets of Brazil.

Any type of vessel can sail up the Amazon as far as Iquitos, Peru. An English dreadnought made that trip once. I believe all the fuels necessary can be bought, though wood is used to great extent by local native shippers.

Living is both cheap and expensive and I think you know what I mean. Food cheap, clothing expensive, and especially now with the slump every imported article is high and added to that the matter of depreciated exchange must be considered.

It will be fairly warm for you even, I believe, most of the time, though there are frequent and almost daily rains.

There is no good map yet. The expedition just returned of Rice may put one out.

My advice is to try it out; you have a lot in your favor and the breaks might be very good in your behalf. Yet— It's hard to hazard a guess.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

Maine

NON-RESIDENTS who want to fish should get a license first.

Request:—"I am writing to see if you can give me information regarding canoe travel in the Moosehead Lake region.

I have been accustomed to this sort of travel, but being from the South, I am not familiar with the laws and requirements of Maine. I have understood that there are restrictions that must be adhered to. I had in mind going to Greenville and getting a canoe there and spending two to three weeks with my wife up through the lakes. I imagine that one can provision all right at this point and probably obtain a canoe.

I would appreciate it very much if you would tell me if there is any form that has to be gone through in the nature of registration or license for such a trip within the State. If so, where is this done and what is the procedure?

My purpose would be on leaving Greenville simply to wander through the lake, camping for the night here and there as I struck a likely place.

I am enclosing a self-addressed envelope for reply and assure you that I will thank you very much for any information you can give me."—John Jay, Boston, Mass.

Reply, by Doctor Hathorne:—The Fish and Game Laws of the State require that all non-residents of the State must be in charge of a registered guide when *camping and building fires* on the wild lands of the State while *fishing or hunting.*

All non-residents must also have a fishing license, if they are fishing, or have fishing-tackle in their possession.

A fishing license will cost $3.15 for each person.

No doubt you could secure a canoe at Greenville, and would have no trouble in finding a guide there if you required one. You understand you would not be obliged to have a guide if you did no fishing.

Valley of 1000 Smokes

AND other places in Alaska where a vacation may be well spent.

Request:—"Will you kindly give me what information you have relative to a vacation trip to Alaska.

1. Is the Valley of 1000 Smokes accessible? How could a small party make arrangements for same?
2. What would be necessary for a small party to vacation in McKinley Park?

I have little idea of making arrangements or what is necessary and would like any information you may give me."—Clyde D. Pence, Chicago, Ill.

Reply, by Mr. Solomons:—The Valley of 1000 Smokes is accessible through the coastwise steamers that ply between Seattle and southern Alaska points going over to Kodiak and vicinity. Alaska Steamship Company, Seattle, Wash., will give you information.

In Mount McKinley Park the approach is by the Alaska Railroad from Seward or Anchorage, up the Susitna valley to some convenient point and packing from there, or wagon work, plus packing afterward, if you want to get close to Mt. McKinley peak itself. Of course there would still be mostly back-packing on a climb, after you had got your horses or mules as far as you could lead them.

It isn't much of a park, merely a reservation for future recreational purposes, in line with the policy of the Government during the last twenty to thirty years—a little like, yet a little different from the policy of the National Forests. Still, while accommodations are practically nil, it *is,* indeed, a fine country and one worth going to for a month or two. It will take you several weeks to go from Chicago to the actual foot of the range, unless you hustle almightily!

As to equipment, the usual clothes for any outing in the West, plus a good waterproof tent for summer rains and mosquito proof, at that. Plus, again, head-nets for mosquitoes, fitting over the crown of the hat and puckering about the shoulders far enough from the neck to give good clearance away from it. Bobbinet, keeping out gnats is better than mosquito bar, though not so "visible" through it. Without horses or a wagon it is quite an undertaking to pack grub and outfit to the mountains, though you may find out at Anchorage that there are already some means procurable for getting into the park which money can buy—that is, some enterprising chap may have put a motor or a pack train or something at the disposal—for a price—of intending visitors up there. Foot-wear will be ordinary, adapted to any mountain country, with an extra pair—made of rubber of some sort—for wet going. The weather will be neither hot nor cold, but at high altitudes, cold of course at night.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

Sailing on the Sound

THE best one-man rig.

Request:—"How big a sail-boat should one man 6 feet, 170 pounds—and one boy 4 feet 11 inches, 105 pounds—be able to handle in enclosed waters, such as Long Island Sound, N. Y. Harbor, Chesapeake Bay, etc.?

2. The same, for coasting up and down the Atlantic?

3. What rig recommended for each?

The idea is to live half the year or so on the boat. I'm certain I can work it with a motor-boat, but sail is rather a closed book to me. Accordingly any general suggestion will be gratefully received. Also the mention of a reliable book on the technique of sailing.

Can you tell me the size and rig of the *Speejacks?*

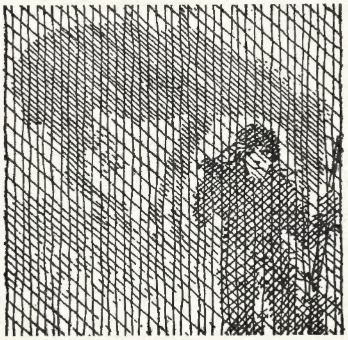
Did one man handle her? If you don't know offhand, don't bother to look it up. Happy landings."—
BRYAN LYCAN, Astoria, L. I.

Reply, by Mr. Beriah Brown:—One man, in enclosed waters, can handle a 30 or 35 foot craft all right, and such a craft can give him ample room. In fact three or more could be housed aboard her comfortably.

For a one-man rig, the yawl is far and away the best. The sloop rig with one big sail is almost too much to handle alone. The divided sail area of a yawl has several advantages, not the least of which is the ease with which sail can be lowered. The size and rig I suggest will permit a man to go outside and make offshore cruises. Strictly for inland waters, a craft of 25 feet in length will answer all purposes. Indeed, even a smaller craft will do to knock around in.

The Rudder Publishing Company, 9 Murray St., New York, publishes several different books, at various prices on small boat handling, navigation and the like. Send for their catalog and pick out what you like. Your idea appeals to me, but on the other hand the requests I have frequently from men who have never handled a sail-boat for information about making a cruise around the world or to South Sea Islands, gives me at times an acute pain. It never seems to strike any one of them that it requires better seamanship to handle a small craft in heavy weather than it does to take the deck of an Atlantic liner, but that is nevertheless true.

"ASK ADVENTURE" editors are appointed with extreme care. If you can meet our exacting requirements and qualify as an expert on some topic or territory not now covered, we shall be glad to talk matters over with you. Address JOSEPH COX, *Adventure*, New York.



LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, ***give your own name if possible.*** All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

GARLAND, JOHN. Lived with me in Yucatan, fished for sharks toward Central America. Was headed toward brother in Venezuela summer of 1924. Please write.—Address W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 6204 Georgia Ave., Washington, D. C.

PUGH, WILLIAM ALONZA. Kindly write your sister. Address MRS. BEULAH PUGH, 8532 102nd St., Richmond Hill, Long Island, N. Y.

LALLA, GEORGE. Come home. Mother ill from worry. Wire if you need funds.—EMILY.

BRIGHAM, FRANKLIN WILSON. Left Melrose Park, Ill., Sept., 1907. His brother would like to hear from him.—Address ELMER N. BRIGHAM, 553 Markham St., Toronto, Can.

McCARTHY, JOSEPH A. Born in New York City, Dec. 14, 1902. Adopted in 1905 by Mrs. Mary B. Miles, who lived at 18 Rosa Park, New Orleans, La. In 1907 he went to live with the Rev. J. M. Kellogg, a catholic priest, at Jesuits Bend, La. In 1911 he was taken back to New York by some nuns from the Orphans' Foundling Home in New York. He later went to the Hotel Greenwald, New Orleans, La. Was later caught and put in St. Agnes Home in Staten Island, N. Y. In 1915 or 1916 he was adopted by an engineer from the Erie R. R. and is supposed to be working as a brakeman for that railroad. Any information will be appreciated.—Address C. A. SANFORD, JR., U. S. S. *Mississippi*, Box 12, care of Postmaster, San Francisco, Calif.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

MUIR, WILL CARTER. Ex-navy man. Age 35 years, 6 feet tall, blue eyes, brown hair, little finger of left hand missing. Left Kalamazoo, Michigan, Jan. 10, 1925. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. ANNA M. MUIR, 1516 N. Burdick St., Kalamazoo, Mich.

ANYONE knowing the whereabouts of Stewart W Cairncross or Frank Veidiglione, who were soldiers in the Ordinance Dept. at Raritan Arsenal, Metuchen, New Jersey in 1920, please write.—Address A. H. JACKSON, P. O. Box 98, Corozal, Canal Zone.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

BETTSCHEN, GEORGE F. Last heard from two years ago. Age 21 years, height 6 ft., weight about 150 lbs., dark hair and eyes, slight scar on lower lip. Any information will be appreciated.—Address FRED BETTSCHEN, Wolf Point, Montana.

ROSENFELD, MAX. Lived at 103 Columbia St., N. Y. C. Was stenographer for the South American Magazine. Later in service of State. Any information will be appreciated.—Address J. R., Box 51, Yellowstone County, Custer, Montana.

RIVET, FRED. Born in Cedar Springs, Michigan. Last heard of in 1898. Worked in lumber woods in Alden Bridge, La. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. FRANK RIVET, 309 Ann St., W., Belding, Michigan.

MEACHAM, JOHN L. Last seen in Washington, D. C. three years ago. About 5 feet 6 inches tall, dark brown hair and blue eyes. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MRS. HELEN M. KELLEY, 93 N. E. 20th St., Miami, Fla.

COHEN, MIKE. Formerly served on U. S. S. *Newport.* during 1918-1921. Was a friend of yeoman 3d cl. John D. Sullivan on the same ship. Please write.—Address LIEUT. THOMAS L. SULLIVAN, 190 Highland St., Roxbury, Mass.

HOAG, H. Please write to 4322 Trumbull, or call Glendale 3247J.

HARDY, CONSTANCE. Last seen in Charity Hospital, New Orleans, La., December, 1921. Any information will be appreciated.—Address PVT. NEIL G. WESLEY, Receiving Ship, Navy Yard, Puget Sound, Washington.

BEST, CHRISTINE and CATHARINE. Last heard of twelve years ago in Montreal, Canada. Any information will be appreciated by their brother Charlie.—Address CHARLES BEST, care of R. McCalmont, 826 Main St., Winnipeg, Canada.

BRIDGES, ALFRED RENTON. Last heard of in San Francisco, Calif., calling for letters addressed to Seamen's Institute, 59 Clay St., San Francisco, Calif. Age 24 years, 5 feet 11 inches tall. Any information will be appreciated by his parents.—Address 5 Bank St., Ascot Vale, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

DAY, HERBERT. Will love you always. Will forgive any thing. Tramped Oklahoma and Kansas looking for you. Write your wife.—Address your DOLLY.

HALE, EDNA. Middle-age, brilliant dark eyes, magnetic, vivacious manner, medium sized. Last heard of at Bellevue Terrace Hotel, 6th and Figueroa Sts., Los Angeles, Calif., in the summer of 1922. Was then teaching and healing in New Thought. She was a graduate of D. L. Moody School at Northfield, Mass., also a student of Wellesley College. Was in France part of the time during the war. Any information will be appreciated by her friend.—Address MARTHA FRASER, Rocks, Harford County, Maryland.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

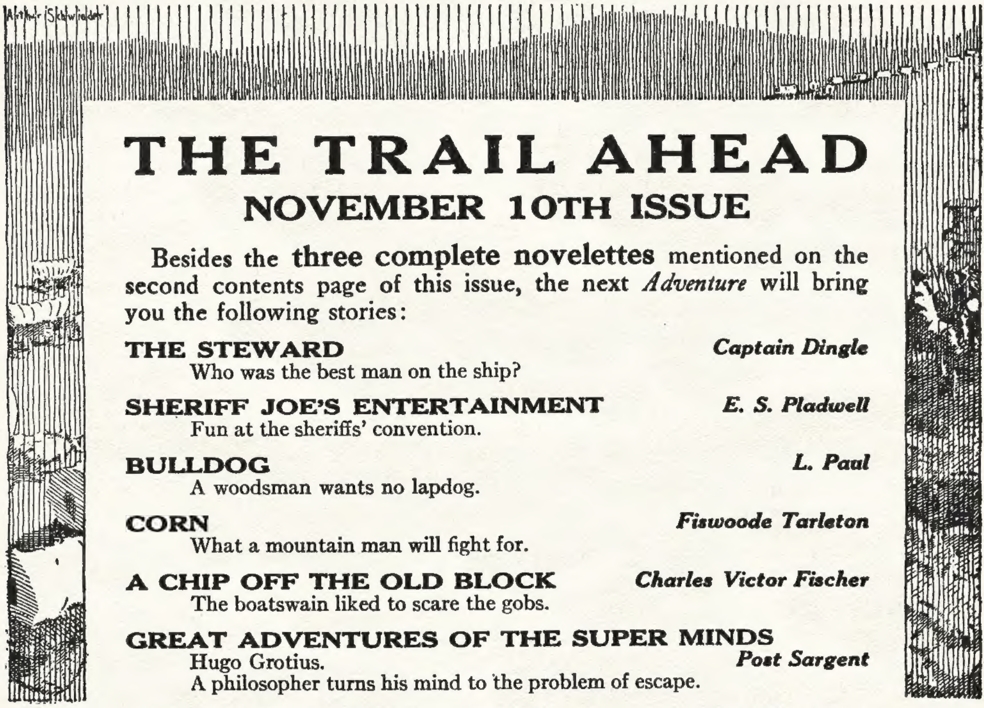
SHAKELFORD, EMLISS. Age 23 years, light sandy hair, light brown eyes. Last heard from April 16, 1919, he was then at the Charleston Children's Home, Charleston, Va. He later joined the U. S. Navy in Hampton Roads, Virginia. Any information will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. ELIZABETH HARPER, 52 Campbell St., Akron, Ohio.

THE following have been inquired for in either the September 20, or October 10, 1925 issues of ADVENTURE. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine:

BAKER, Ray A.; Boggs, Jack J.; Braley, Ralph; Davis, Andrew Lester; Donnelly, John; Farren, Jack; Flynn, Mrs. Ella Brooker; Gordon, J. H.; Greene, James William; Hale, Jim; Lederer, Abe; Lemley, Pop; Locke, Charles F.; Mallot, Willard E.; Perrett or Perett, Ferdinand; Prince, Philip J.; (Jack); Reeves, Reginald Floyd; Richmond, Earl; Sprague, W. A.; Stapley, James; Tanner, Dick; Williams, E.; Woollweever, Adolph Richard and Benjamin Franklin.

MISCELLANEOUS: Bud; Men of the 22nd U. S. Infantry Co. G, who served in Alaska and Texas and who were acquainted with Pvt. Charles T. Matthews. Would like to hear from any member of the old 21st Balloon Co. from the date of 1919 to 1922;

UNCLAIMED MAIL: Palmer, George Jack; Werner, Berthold S.; Wright, Charles J.



THE TRAIL AHEAD

NOVEMBER 10TH ISSUE

Besides the **three complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE STEWARD *Captain Dingle*
Who was the best man on the ship?

SHERIFF JOE'S ENTERTAINMENT *E. S. Pladwell*
Fun at the sheriffs' convention.

BULLDOG *L. Paul*
A woodsman wants no lapdog.

CORN *Fiswoode Tarleton*
What a mountain man will fight for.

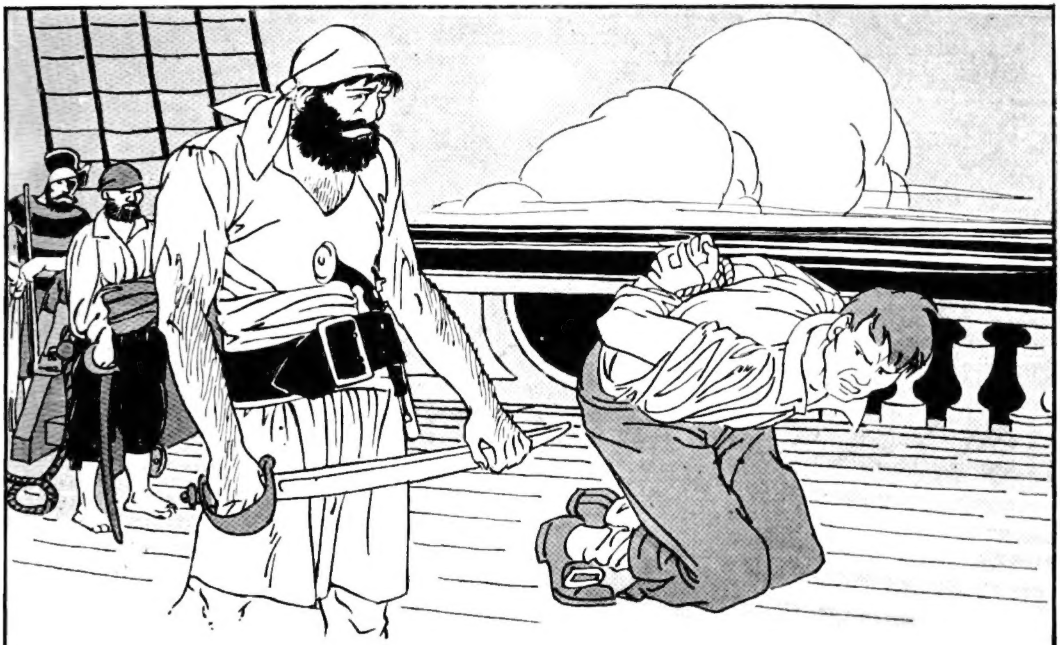
A CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK *Charles Victor Fischer*
The boatswain liked to scare the gobs.

GREAT ADVENTURES OF THE SUPER MINDS *Post Sargent*
Hugo Grotius.
A philosopher turns his mind to the problem of escape.

THE BORDER BREED Part III *Hugh Pendexter*
In the shadow of a great war.

STILL
FARTHER
AHEAD

THE THREE ISSUES following the next will contain *long* stories by Talbot Mundy, T. S. Stribling, Thomson Burtis, Harold Lamb, W. C. Tuttle, Leslie McFarlane, Elmer Brown Mason, William P. Barron and Georges Surdez; short stories by Larry Barretto, John Webb, S. B. H. Hurst, John Joseph, Bruce Johns, Wilkeson O'Connell, Ralph R. Perry, Alan LeMay, Barry Scobee and others; stories about ancient Britons off the coast of Rome, detectives in the Barbados, cowboys on the Western range, aviators in the oilfields, Don Cossacks on the Russian steppes, voodoo worshipers in Haiti, French troopers in Africa, daring men in dangerous places up and down the earth.



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